Necroperformance. Cultural Reconstructions of the War Body

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Abstract: Searching for traces of memory in precarious bodies inflicted with the violence of war, Necroperformance implores us to acknowledge the fragility of life as it actively reinforces an attitude of respect for the right to live. Sajewska constructs here an alternative culture archive, conjuring it from compoundly-mediatized historical remnants—bodies, documents, artworks, and cultural writings—that demand to be recognized in non-canonical reflection on our past. Her chief objective is to understand the social impact of remains and their place in culture, and by examining the body and corporality in artistic practices, social and cultural performances, she strives to identify both the fragmentariness of memory and the discontinuity of history, and finally, to reinstate the body's (or its documental remains') historical and political dimension.

Necroperformance

Dorota Sajewska

Necroperformance
Cultural Reconstructions of the War Body

Translated from the Polish
by Simon Wloch

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The Postmortal Life of the Body—A Prologue

A light-blue cardboard box blanketed in thick layers of dust sat in the depository of the Archiwum Akt Nowych (Archive of New Records) in Warsaw. The crossed-out handwriting on the box suggested it had once held the contents of a postal package. Inside it now were eighteen navy-blue school notebooks, dated from May 1913 to October 1918, eleven of them from 1913 and seven from the period of the Great War. The last notebook contained notes on the classification of plants and minerals, with references to German botanical and mineralogical literature from the late 19th century, while the seventeen notebooks preceding it comprised an amateur herbarium. Glued to each of the 370 pages was a dried plant specimen, labeled with its German and Latin names, its origin, and the date of collection or acquisition. Some specimens were accompanied by an extensive description of the plant's appearance—its physical characteristics, color, and even fragrance—along with information on the individual who had supplied it. The means by which the dried plants had been preserved suggested that the person compiling the herbarium either had little experience or did the job hurriedly: the specimens (generally rootless) were entirely coated with glue and thus inflicted with varying degrees of damage. Often, only fragments of plants were included—single blossoms, leaves, or twigs—making their identification difficult or outright impossible. Yet the dried fragments were supplemented with illustrations of the missing parts, drawn in pencil, ink, or colored crayon. Likewise, the strikethroughs and corrections visible on numerous pages attest to aspirations of accuracy on the part of the herbarium's author—none other than Rosa Luxemburg.[1]

1 See Hanna Werblan-Jakubiec and Jakub Dolatowski, "Komentarz do zielnika Róży Luxemburg," in Rosa Luxemburg, *Zielnik* [Herbarium] (Warsaw: Rosa Luxemburg Foundation, 2009), p. 9.

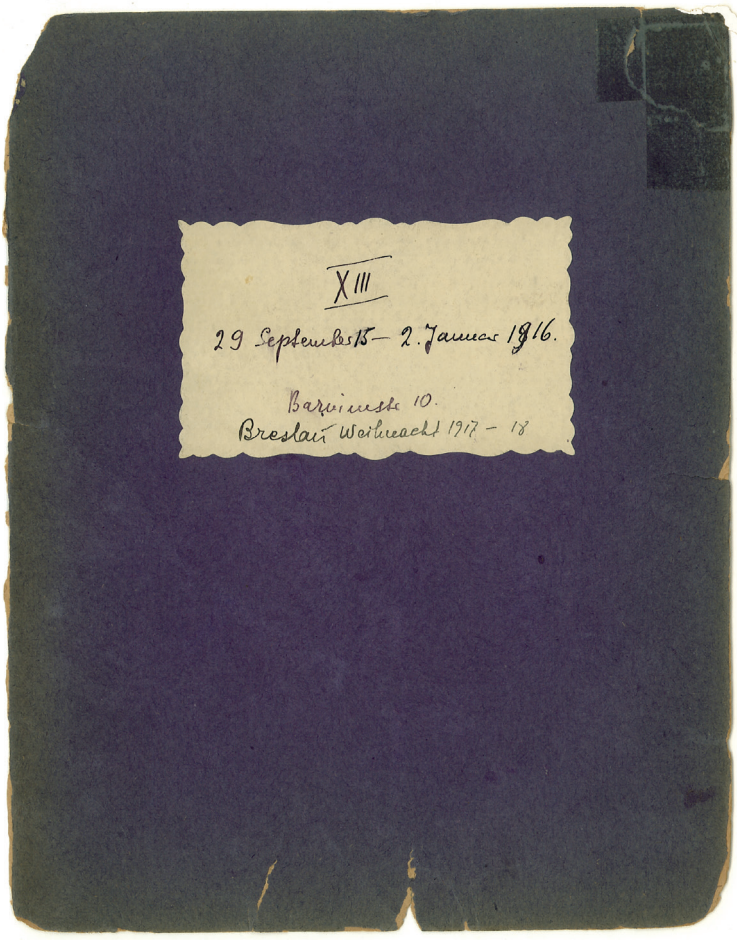

Fig. 1: The cover of Rosa Luxemburg's herbarium, notebook No. 13.

The origin of the botanical artifact must already have been clear in the 1970s when this extraordinary document of the life of the Polish-German socialist arrived at the Consulate General of the Polish People's Republic in New York and entered the Central Archive of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party. The cardboard box into which the herbarium notebooks had been packed was addressed to the Consul General, identified as "Mr. A. Janowski." In the top left corner was the stamp of the initial sender, the Czas Publishing Company, a Polish American publishing house operating out of Brooklyn from 1925 to 1975. Having been returned to Polish hands, the herbarium languished unstudied for many years, with subsequent authorship inquiries made only in 2009, when the staff of the Archive of New Records were doing an inventory of the holdings of the former Central Archive of the Polish Left.[2] The shoebox-like parcel of notebooks filled with crumbling dried plants did not appear to possess significant political value, especially since it had belonged to an activist whose views were not held in particularly high esteem. The negative reputation clinging to Luxemburg regarding her political convictions had already taken shape within the international communist movement prior to World War II and spread into Poland in the

2 The herbarium of Rosa Luxemburg was officially handed over to the Archives of New Records on April 1, 1990 along with the entirety of the collections of the Central Archive of the Polish Left, pursuant to an accord dated March 31, 1990, signed by the director of Poland's National Archives, Marian Wojciechowski; the director of the Archive of New Records, Bohdan Kroll; the deputy chair of the board of the Social Democracy Party of the Republic of Poland, Tomasz Nałęcz; and the director of the Central Archive of the Polish Left, Stanisław Seklecki. Prior to this, the herbarium had resided in the Central Archive of the Polish Left (functioning from 1948–57 as the archive of the Party History Department of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party; from 1957–71 under the name Party History Company of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party; and from 1971–90 as the Central Archive of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party).

1930s,[3] never to be revised after the war and remaining in place as the official stance of the victorious party against Luxemburg. And while the "chief pillars" of the "flawed system of Luxemburgism" were believed to be its "theory of the spontaneity of mass movements and the theory of accumulation of capital, imperialism, and the crash of capitalism,"[4] the dismay with which Luxemburg had been regarded ever since the late 1920s was connected above all to her criticism of the Bolshevik model of unipartisan organizations.[5]

Yet the problem Polish critics had with the doctrines espoused by Luxemburg stem from activities that predate the 1920s outcry against her criticism of the Bolsheviks. Born in 1871 into an assimilated Jewish family in Zamość, Poland, Luxemburg spent her childhood and adolescence in Warsaw, later studying in Zurich, Geneva, and Paris. She left Warsaw by 1889 to join the international socialist movement, living primarily in Berlin for more than 20 years until her murder in 1919, ordered by the SPD (Social Democratic Party of Germany) government. On January 15, 1919, Rosa Luxemburg and fellow revolutionary leader Karl Liebknecht were arrested in Wilmersdorf, and after two days of interrogation brutally murdered by the Freikorps, a proto-Nazi militia deriving from the defeated German military.

Luxemburg, who was totally involved in German politics, had returned to Poland only once, to take an active part in the 1905 Revolution in the Kingdom of Poland. She believed the mass strike to be a particularly beneficial form of political and economic resistance. Nonetheless, she believed nationalistic sentiments to be a relic of feudal, precapitalist Poland. The views

3 Polish criticism of Rosa Luxemburg can be traced back to the writings of Jerzy Ryng (Heryng), author of *Luksemburgizm w kwestii polskiej* (Moscow: Wydawnictwo Partyjne, 1933).

4 Jan Dziewulski, *Wokół poglądów ekonomicznych Róży Luksemburg* (Warsaw: Książka i Wiedza, 1972), p. 10.

5 See Rosa Luxemburg, *The Russian Revolution*, trans. Bertram Wolfe (New York: Workers Age Publishers, 1940).

Fig. 2: Rosa Luxemburg's herbarium, notebook No. 14.

of Marx and Engels, who saw the Polish national uprisings as a significant revolutionary factor in the run-up to the declaration of war on Russia, were described by Luxemburg as an "outworn vestige of old views that had been based on an ignorance of the social content of the nationalist movements within Poland and of the social changes that had taken place within the country since the previous insurrection."[6] She believed that the January Uprising (1863–64) against the Russian Empire and the ensuing capitalist influences transformed the hitherto peripheral nation of Poland into a modern country driven from the beginning by class struggle. In her eloquent manner, Luxemburg defined that process of transformation as modernism doing a dance on the remains of the anachronistic past.

> But in point of fact, when Engels wrote these words, "the Poles,"that is, that undifferentiated nation whose sole concern was presumably the struggle for independence, had long ceased to exist—if indeed they had ever existed. For at just this time Poland was experiencing orgies of "organic labor," the frantic dance of capitalism and capitalist enrichment over the graves of the Polish nationalist movements and the Polish nobility, by then a thing of the past.[7]

At the same time, she was convinced that the constitution and direction of sociopolitical efforts were not conducive to the restoration of an independent Polish state and that, therefore, the Polish proletariat—now split up by borders drawn from the partitioning of Poland by the Russian Empire, The Kingdom of Prussia, and Habsburg Austria after the failed 1794 Kościuszko Uprising—ought to abandon their pro-sovereign dictates and instead join the struggle of the global proletariat for social

6 Rosa Luxemburg, "Przedmowa," in *Kwestja polska a ruch socjalistyczny. Zbiór artykułów o kwestji polskiej R. Luksemburg, K. Kautsky'ego, F. Mehringa, Parvusa i innych* (Krakow: Socjaldemokracja Królestwa Polskiego i Litwy, 1905), p. v.
7 Ibid.

liberation, following in the footsteps of the democratic revolution in Russia and socialist revolution in Germany. The conflict between Rosa Luxemburg, representing social-revolutionism, and activists from Polish Socialist Party circles, advocating social democracy,[8] arising at the moment of the Revolution in the Kingdom of Poland, led to a gradual silencing and eventually the enduring suppression of Luxemburg's ideas and expulsion from Polish cultural memory.

Who then, and for what purpose, would return after Poland's political transformation in 1989 to a theorist and activist who undermined the idea of an independent Poland way back on the cusp of the 20th century? But there was in fact something of a revival of Rosa Luxemburg's ideas, believed up to then to be dead and buried in the annals of the Polish Left, in the early 21st century. First, the Książka i Prasa Publishing Institute put out two anthologies of her writings—*The Crisis of German Social Democracy (The Junius Pamphlet)* (1915/16)[9] and *The Russian Revolution* (1918/22)[10]—followed by a reprint of her *Accumulation of Capital*,[11] a key work in terms of political economic theory. New editions of the socialist theorist's works appeared just as the global economic crisis of 2007/08 was taking hold, which many analysts compared to the political and economic situation in 1929. The economic collapse of the 21st century demonstrated the critical state of contemporary social democracy; just as prior to World War I, when social democracy "silently

8 Lending a voice to the conflict was a series of articles and correspondence with Emil Haecker of the magazine *Naprzód*, in *Kwestja polska a ruch socjalistyczny*.

9 Rosa Luxemburg, *Kryzys socjaldemokracji* (Warsaw: Książka i Prasa, 2005).

10 Rosa Luxemburg, *O Rewolucji. Rosja 1905, 1917* (Warsaw: Książka i Prasa, 2005).

11 Rosa Luxemburg, *Akumulacja kapitału. Przyczynek do ekonomicznego wyjaśnienia imperializmu*, trans. Julian Maliniak, Zenona Kluza-Wołosiewicz, and Jerzy Nowacki (Warsaw: Książka i Prasa, 2011).

gave its consent to military rule,"[12] contemporary social democracy didn't really oppose the consequences of neoliberalism, the wave of conservatism, and the growing threat of war. At the end of the 20th century social democrats repeated the mistake of supporting actions leading to violence (like the global arms trade and the closing of borders in Europe) and failed to find solutions to social issues.[13] Surprisingly, no less significant was the rediscovery of the Luxemburg's herbarium in the Archive of New Records and its subsequent 2009 publication in the form of an illustrated album, put together by the Polish branch of the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation.[14] This happened to coincide with a renewed interest in Rosa Luxemburg within the German media, spurred by a spectacular discovery made by Dr. Michael Tsokos of the Charité hospital in Berlin.

Almost immediately after being appointed chief of the hospital's Institute of Legal Medicine and Forensic Sciences in January 2007, Tsokos began work on an exhibition that was to showcase the collection of specimens gathered by the Institute over a span of decades. Stored in the basement warehouse were hundreds of "dusty and, for years, totally neglected specimens" of body parts and organs preserved in formaldehyde, mummified heads, human bones, fetuses, and infant remains.[15] In this unusual archive, Tsokos came across a particular specimen whose documentation was incomplete: remains of a woman preserved in wax, without any identification number or age designation and unaccounted for in all of the inventory records. The headless and limbless body did, however, possess two

12 Rosa Luxemburg, *The Crisis of German Social-Democracy (The Junius Pamphlet)* (New York: The Socialist Publication Society, 1919), p. 83.

13 See Przemysław Wielgosz, "Róża Luksemburg i kryzys socjaldemokracji," in Rosa Luxemburg, *Kryzys*, pp. 6–7.

14 Rosa Luxemburg, *Zielnik* [Herbarium] (Warsaw: Rosa Luxemburg Foundation, 2009).

15 Michael Tsokos (with Veit Etzold and Lothar Strüh), *Dem Tod auf der Spur. Dreizehn spektakuläre Fälle aus der Rechtsmedizin* (Berlin: Ullstein Buchverlage, 2009), p. 236.

Fig. 3: Rosa Luxemburg's herbarium, notebook No. 11.

characteristic features: the woman had been very short in stature and had somewhat protruding hips, indicating a degenerative condition in this part of her body. A specialist who had worked there for more than thirty years remarked to Tsokos that the woman's height and build were reminiscent of Rosa Luxemburg's. There had long circulated rumors among hospital staff that the revolutionist's body was brought there after her murder and had never left the Charité hospital.

On May 29, 2009, Tsokos made a public announcement regarding the body's presumed identity, talking about it in interviews with the media and finally adding a "thirteenth spectacular forensic medicine case"—that is, the case of Rosa Luxemburg—to his book titled *Dem Tod auf der Spur* (On the Trail of Death), published in October of that year.[16] Until Tsokos's inquiries into the matter, Luxemburg's biographers never raised any questions regarding the whereabouts of her remains, which, after her assassination, were said to have been recovered from the Landwehrkanal in Berlin on May 31, 1919, and laid to rest on June 13, 1919. Having familiarized himself with the forensic records of the military hospital in Zossen, to which the recovered woman's body had been brought, Tsokos put forth a hypothesis that the identification of the body fished out from the canal as Rosa Luxemburg's was meant to cover up the murder. It was also likely that the desire to close the Luxemburg case as quickly as possible prompted the determination that the unidentified corpse was the detested communist. Comparing two sets of records produced by forensic doctors—Prof. Paul Fraenckl and Dr. Fritz Strassmann—Tsokos also suggested that the post-mortem had been performed under pressure from the military. The then minister of defense, Gustav Noske, wanted desperately to publicly lay to rest the remains identified as

16 Tsokos's book was a resounding success in Germany, with nine editions published as of 2013.

Luxemburg, who was becoming even more politically problematic in death than in life.[17]

In an effort to conclusively determine the identity of the body discovered in his institution, Tsokos contacted some of the US archives,[18] hoping to get fingerprints from objects once owned by Luxemburg residing in their collection. Tsokos then traveled to Warsaw to collect DNA samples from the revolutionist's herbarium. The archival material, trivialized up to that point, was suddenly to become a key piece of evidence in the efforts to identify the remains at the Charité hospital, whose burial was soon to take place. However, there were too many distinct sets of fingerprints on the herbarium and on the photographs, letters, and postcards that had also been newly rediscovered in the Archive of New Records around that time. Tsokos then reached out to a relative of the revolutionist in Israel, Irena Borde, with a request for permission to have the bodies of Luxemburg's parents exhumed. Borde's refusal of permission to open the parents' graves in Warsaw, the failure to find any evidence in the Archive of New Records, the futile attempts to collect fingerprints from objects once belonging to Rosa Luxemburg and currently residing in American archives, and finally the objections raised by the community of Luxemburg's biographers—who accused Tsokos of defiling her memory for the sake of media attention for his own book—soon throttled the spectacular efforts of the doctor of forensic medicine. In the end, the wax-preserved woman's body at the Charité hospital was never identified.

17 Tsokos wondered why the two forensic medicine specialists had not identified the body of Rosa Luxemburg in their own workplace, the Charité hospital, but instead had them taken to the Zossen lazaretto located 50 km from Berlin. He also noted the unusual brevity of the first report from June 3, 1919 (three pages), and the superficiality of the language, the name Rosa Luxemburg not appearing anywhere in the document. Only in the second report, thirteen pages long, from June 13, the day of the funeral, were the remains conclusively identified as those of the revolutionist.

18 Tsokos does not specify which archives are concerned.

Ethical evaluations of exhumation aside, it must be acknowledged that the efforts undertaken by Tsokos not only revived the memory of Rosa Luxemburg but also demonstrated the importance of forensic science in the discourse on memory. More than anything, his efforts confirmed the political and symbolic power of exhuming and identifying victims, acts that "lie at the intersection of different moral, metaphysical, and psychological preoccupations and anxieties concerning mortality, individuality, the fallibility of memory and historical narrative, the infallibility of physical proof, and the possibility of redemption and closure in the wake of trauma."[19] Layla Renshaw, the author of the book *Exhuming Loss*, asserts that the identification of remains plays a particularly strong role in the media, as it satisfies the generally held conviction that there is a fundamental connection between physical evidence and objectivism. For much of society the recovery of human remains is equivalent to finding evidence and is "indispensable in order to enact death rituals, enable healthy mourning, and achieve psychological closure."[20]

Tsokos's efforts to tie up the loose ends of the revolutionist's story by identifying her corpse indicates just how culturally crucial is the borderline between animate and inanimate, body and corpse; the importance of the determination of life and of death being in sound legal order; and the significance of the role of documentation in that process. A direct effect of the backlash to Tsokos's undertaking was his accumulation of unpublished documents that allow for a detailed recreation of the process of identifying Luxemburg's body.[21] As early as February 18, 1919, multiple attempts to recover Luxemburg's body had been made by the diver Alfred Kock, working under orders from the Garde-Kavalerie-Schützen-Division. Combing the section of the canal

19 Layla Renshaw, *Exhuming Loss* (Walnut Creek, Calif.: Left Coast Press, 2011), p. 11.

20 Ibid.

21 *Rosa Luxemburgs Tod. Dokumente und Kommentare,* eds. Annelies Laschitza and Klaus Gietinger (Leipzig: Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung Sachsen, 2010).

between Lichtensteinbrücke and Freiarchenbrücke meter by meter, he did in fact discover three drowned bodies (one man and two women), though none of these corpses belonged to Rosa Luxemburg.[22] It was only on May 31, 1919, at around 5:45 a.m., that patrolman Gottfried Knepel pulled ashore a body floating on the canal a few meters from Freiarchenbrücke, just under the train overpass; a body that during the post-mortem examination held on June 3, 1919, he identified as being the one he had found in the river.[23] Assuming (as did his fellow party members) that he had found the remains of Rosa Luxemburg, Noske issued a gag order and had the body sent not to the Institute of Forensic Medicine at Berlin's Charité hospital but to the military hospital at the garrison in Zossen, some distance from Berlin. Perhaps Rosa Luxemburg's closest friend, Mathilde Jacob, was correct when she claimed that Noske "must have had something to gain from the body."[24]

Once the body arrived at the Zossen lazaretto, the process of its identification began. On June 4, 1919, Mathilde Jacob sent a telegram to Clara Zetkin stating "that is undoubtedly Rosa's body,"[25] which was not long after she asserted, while being questioned about Rosa's belongings, that "my being wrong is out of the question."[26] It is worthwhile, however, to note that the identification was made neither by a direct viewing of the corpse (though she expressed willingness, Jacob was not permitted to go to Zossen) nor by way of photographs ("I would rather not

22 Klaus Gietinger, "Die Auffindung der Leiche," in *Rosa Luxemburgs Tod*, pp. 50–51.

23 See "Protokoll über Zeugenvernehmung und über die Obduktion der Leiche im Garnisonlazarett in Wunsdorf am 3. Juni 1919," in *Rosa Luxemburgs Tod*, p. 109.

24 "Auszug aus den Erinnerungen Mathilde Jacobs 'Von Rosa Luxemburg und ihren Freunden in Krieg und Revolution 1914–1919' von 1930," in *Rosa Luxemburgs Tod*, p. 146.

25 "Telegramm von Mathilde Jacob, Berlin, an Clara Zetkin nach Degerloch bei Stuttgart vom 4. Juni 1919," in *Rosa Luxemburgs Tod,* p. 130.

26 "Protokoll der Vernehmung von Maxim Zetkin und Mathilde Jacob durch Kriegsgerischtsrat Ehrhardt am 4. Juni 1919," in *Rosa Luxemburgs Tod*, p. 124.

look at photos of the corpse").[27] Jacob made the identification on the basis of scraps of fabric from a blue velvet dress, a gold medallion, a velvet choker necklace, and a pair of brown gloves. Wanda Marcusson, in whose apartment Rosa Luxemburg had been apprehended on January 15, 1919, also testified that on the day in question Rosa was wearing a blue velvet dress, and in addition stated emphatically: "I am certain that the scraps of fabric shown to me are from her dress. Above all, the material and the colors are a match."[28] Marcusson also recognized the choker, which Rosa was wearing on her neck, the gloves, and a pair of black stockings that she had lent to Rosa on the very day of her death.[29] Somewhat different was the identification procedure with Dr. Maxim Zetkin, the son of Clara Zetkin and a friend of Rosa's, who was not shown the actual body but only photos of it, which proved insufficient for him to make an identification. Yet, looking at the same photographs, Paul Levi, meanwhile, had no doubt that they "concerned the remains of Rosa Luxemburg."[30] In the documentation containing the testimony of those who had seen the body itself, it was unanimously clear that the decomposition process of the body fished out from the canal more than four months after Luxemburg's murder was so advanced, and the face so disfigured, that it was not possible to recognize any distinguishing features, like, for instance, the shape of the nose[31] or the eyes, of which "only blackened frag-

27 Ibid.

28 "Protokoll über die Vernehmung von Wanda Marcusson, Siegfried Nestriepke und Schleusenwarter Gottfried Knepel durch Kriegsgerichtsrat Ehrhardt am 4. Juni 1919," in *Rosa Luxemburgs Tod*, p. 125.

29 Ibid., p. 126.

30 "Auszug aus den Erinnerungen Mathilde Jacobs 'Von Rosa Luxemburg und ihren Freunden in Krieg und Revolution 1914–1919' von 1930," *Rosa Luxemburgs Tod,* p. 147.

31 See the testimonies of witnesses of the body's recovery from the canal, e.g., of Lt. Walter Kaehler: "Protokoll über Zeugenvernehmung und über die Obduktion der Leiche im Garnisonlazarett in Wunsdorf am 3. Juni 1919," in *Rosa Luxemburgs Tod,* p. 110.

ments of tissue remained."[32] Only the woman's height (146 cm) and the slight protrusion of the left hip attested to the identity of the body as Rosa Luxemburg.

From a historical and cultural perspective, Tsokos's efforts indicate above all that only a biography and a necrography, whose aim is to reconstruct the posthumous life of a person and of all of the material remains associated with them, can together make sense of and capture the full depth of human existence. The necrography, as asserted by Stanisław Rosiek in *Zwłoki Mickiewicza. Próba nekrografii poety* (Mickiewicz's Remains. An Attempted Necrography of the Poet), plays a crucial role in the formation of the image of the "Deceased Hero" ("Wielki Zmarły"[33]) a great figure who rises posthumously thanks to the power of his symbolic influence on the living. Such a transformation of the dead into a "meaningful corpse" which becomes a "participant in a dialogue with the living" proceeds simultaneously in two directions:

> The remains become "secondary remains"—a figment, a diffuse and fragmentary effigy (death mask, photographs, drawings—their numerous copies, facsimiles and replicas being figments of a figment). At the same time, the remains become an "object of mourning." They are embalmed, dressed, surrounded by symbolic objects, encased in a coffin, and interred in a grave marked with a headstone.[34]

Working from this perspective, Rosiek reconstructed the history of the corpse of Adam Mickiewicz and all of the material remains he left behind, which "for decades had been treated by Poles with the highest reverence and elevated to the rank of national relics."[35] For the purpose of his reconstruction, the

32 Ibid., p. 115.
33 This is a name given to Mickiewicz by Stanisław Rosiek. See Stanisław Rosiek, *Zwłoki Mickiewicza. Proba nekrografii poety* (Gdańsk: słowo/obraz terytoria, 1997).
34 Ibid., pp. 26–27.
35 Ibid., p. 25.

author of Mickiewicz's necrography described in great detail the poet's death on November 26, 1855, in Constantinople and what happened to the corpse of the nation's greatest poet over the next three days. Rosiek performed a thorough analysis of the process of overcoming the crisis related to the material decomposition of Mickiewicz's body, and consequently to the breakdown of semiotic structures in society. The efforts to prevent Mickiewicz's corpse from decomposing sparked the reanimation of Mickiewicz after his death as an object of mourning. Through the transformation of his dead body from a corpse with mere biological status into a dead hero with cultural status, Mickiewicz could become a "deceased hero" and find a new place in the symbolic reality of the culture: remaining among the living and continuing to speak to them as the great Polish writer. Rosiek then demonstrated how the dead Mickiewicz had inherited the status and fame of the living national bard and was permanently inscribed into the "typical scenarios of social life"[36] in Poland, all of which made it possible to analyze the means of the posthumous political utilization and involvement of the writer's remains in Polish culture. Thus typical social life scenarios (burials, funerals, mourning rituals, but also political manifestations, demonstrations, and public speeches) could be understood as cultural performances that aimed to integrate death and dead ancestors into the culture and to avoid the semiotic crisis caused by a dead body. Certainly, the posthumous fate of Rosa Luxemburg is an ambivalent one and cannot be wrapped up in a story as neatly as the one Rosiek managed to build around Poland's national literary hero. Luxemburg's grave—eventually looted by the Nazis in 1935—lies empty; her necrography, after the doubt voiced by Tsokos as to the identity of the body buried in 1919, uncertain. Nevertheless, the reconstruction of her place in the imaginary of culture is made possible by other material remains, such as the objects left behind

36 Ibid., p. 71.

by the deceased: her clothes and photographs in addition to her political writings, letters, and articles. From the perspective of studying the boundary between the animate and the inanimate, the herbarium that has recently—and somewhat incidentally—returned to public consciousness is in fact a priceless record. It is a meta-image of Rosa Luxemburg's political biography as well as of her body's posthumous life.

The Polish-German socialist began compiling her plant pictures in 1913, the very year that she published her most significant work in the field of political economy, *The Accumulation of Capital*. It was in this book that Luxemburg articulated, through in-depth analysis, the mounting incongruities of the capitalist system, which in her opinion aimed to take control of the whole world as a means of production and—being inseparably tied to the imperialistic militarist policy—led directly to World War I. Seeing the process of capital accumulation as "an endless chain of political and social catastrophes and convulsions,"[37] she believed that the only hope for challenging the reign of capitalism lay in a rebellion of the international working class, which would mean the aversion of impending world war through a global proletarian revolution. Georg Lukács confirmed Luxemburg's conclusions:

> And just as the young Marx's concept of totality cast a bright light upon the pathological symptoms of a still-flourishing capitalism, so too in the studies of Rosa Luxemburg we find the basic problems of capitalism analyzed within the context of the historical process as a whole: and in her work we see how the last flowering of capitalism is transformed into a ghastly dance of death, into the inexorable march of Oedipus to his doom.[38]

37 Adam Ciołkosz, *Róża Luksemburg a rewolucja rosyjska* (Paris: Instytut Literacki, 1961), p. 56.

38 Georg Lukács, "The Marxism of Rosa Luxemburg," in *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1971), p. 32.

With that blunt metaphor, Lukács keenly managed to show Luxemburg's understanding of history not as a linear progression of social formations but as a living multitrack process governed by discontinuity, interruptions, conflicts, and antagonism instead of the accumulation of progress, which is predicated on capitalism's maturation.

> The scene has thoroughly changed. The six weeks' march to Paris has grown into a world drama. Mass murder has become a monotonous task, and yet the final solution is not one step nearer. Capitalist rule is caught in its own trap, and cannot ban the spirit that it has invoked.[39]

The fundamental scene-shift diagnosed in the introduction to *The Junius Pamphlet*, published illegally after the outbreak of World War I, was tied to Luxemburg's recognition of the bankruptcy of the patriotic notions in the name of which bourgeois society initiated that war. She rejected the legitimization of violence in the name of the national state, repeating that "the nation is today but a cloak that covers imperialistic desires."[40] In the global catastrophe, Luxemburg also identified the capitulation of international social democracy, which took part in the "capitalistic triumphal march"[41] of nations by supporting the war, thereby not only halting the class struggle for the duration of the war but also contributing to the mass slaughter of the European proletariat:

> Never has a war killed off whole nations; never, within the past century, has it swept over all of the great and established lands of civilized Europe: Millions of human lives were destroyed in the Vosges, in the Ardennes, in Belgium, in Poland, in the Carpathians and on the Save; millions have been hopelessly crippled. But nine-tenths of these mil-

39 Luxemburg, *The Crisis*, p. 7.
40 Ibid., p. 98.
41 Ibid., p. 125.

> lions come from the ranks of the working class of the cities and the farms. It is our strength, our hope, that was mowed down there, day after day, before the scythe of death.[42]

This utterly political work by Rosa Luxemburg, condemning the patriotism of modern nations in the midst of the ongoing war, was written clandestinely in prison and published under the pseudonym "Junius"[43] by the Zurich-based Verlagsdruckerei Union publishing house in 1916. Known for her radically pacifist views, Rosa Luxemburg was arrested in February 1915 and sentenced to one year in prison for giving a speech in Frankfurt am Main on the inhumane treatment of soldiers. And though on the day of her trial her defense attorney presented evidence of thirty thousand cases of cruelty towards soldiers in the German army, the sentence was passed and Luxemburg was detained at the Königlich-Preußisches Weiber-Gefängnis until February 1916. Her persecution did not end with that single stint in jail. On June 10, 1916, she was once again incarcerated—first in Berlin, then in Wronki, and finally in Wrocław—only to be released after the start of the November Revolution in 1918, during which she became both an icon of the working class and a casualty. As a spiritual leader of the proletariat fighting for liberation from the yoke of opportunism, she remained with the masses to the very end and shared their fate, confirming through her actions a statement she had written in *The Junius Pamphlet*: "Man does not make history of his own volition, but he makes history nevertheless."[44]

42 Ibid., p. 126.

43 Using the pseudonym "Junius," Luxemburg references the author(s) of a series of letters dated 1769–72 printed in London, which lambasted the king, ministers, parliament, courts, bureaucrats, and parties. The presumed authors of the letters include more than 30 individuals. See Heinz Knobloch, *Meine liebste Mathilde. Die beste Freundin der Rosa Luxemburg* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1997), p. 40.

44 Luxemburg, *The Crisis,* p. 17.

The years of the war and its preceding and subsequent political crisis, some of which Luxemburg spent in prison, were also the time of her most intensive work on the herbarium. Her dedication to it was certainly an extension of her interest in nature, which she developed while at university in Switzerland, and which always accompanied her political activity. At the University of Zurich, known for its liberal stance on students harboring left-wing views,[45] Luxemburg was the first female student to acquire a doctoral degree and, through her then partner, the revolutionist Leo Jogisches, she became seriously involved in the international socialist emancipation movement.[46] Yet even prior to her enrolment in 1892 in the faculty of law and economics she was known to attend lectures on nature studies and botany.[47] It is worthwhile to note that an interest in the natural world was not uncommon at the time among Polish writers and intellectuals with ties to social and political movements. Stefan Żeromski, who was in Switzerland at the same time as Luxemburg,[48] possessed a knowledge of nature that was self-taught; he is said to have been able to identify more than 400 plant species—flowers, trees, and vines—and to exhibit an extensive familiarity with "the specifics and properties of their anatomy: roots, branches and shoots."[49] This knowledge in the field of botany complemented the author's affinity for rural culture and customs, which was ever-present in his literary output. It was especially evident in "Żeromski's frequent references to

45 See Feliks Tych and Horst Schumacher, *Julian Marchlewski – szkic biograficzny* (Warsaw: Książka i Wiedza, 1966).

46 Annelies Laschitza, "R. Luxemburg – Persönlichkeit, Leben und Werk im aktuellen Disput," in *Rosa Luxemburgs Tod*, p. 18.

47 Luxemburg enrolled in mathematics and nature studies at the Faculty of Philosophy of the University of Zurich in 1890, and in 1892 transferred to the Faculty of Law and Economics. See Ryszard Rauba, "Roża Luksemburg – postać zagubiona w wielokulturowości," *Rocznik Lubuski* 30, 1 (2004), p. 14.

48 From 1892 to 1896, Żeromski worked at the Polish Museum in Rapperswil.

49 Alina Kowalczykowa, "Natura niepodległa," in *Żeromski w Niepodległej. Szkice* (Warsaw: Instytut Badań Literackich PAN, Akademia Humanistyczna, 2013), p. 128.

the world of folk beliefs," to "imagery associated with plants,"[50] and in his language, which was replete with botanical metaphor. Żeromski's fascination with the plant world found its strongest voice in his novel *The Coming Spring*, in which he chose the name Nawłoć (the Polish word for the goldenrod plant, a weed with fine yellow blossoms) for an estate that serves as a metaphor for the noble manor house—its culture, traditions, and values.[51]

Ethnobotany was also a great intellectual passion of Eliza Orzeszkowa, who from 1888 to 1891 published the results of her field studies in a series of articles titled "People and Flowers of the Neman River" in the magazine *Wisła*. While researching a story, the author embarked on what amounts to a masterclass on folk botany, not only learning the vernacular plant names used by villagers in the Grodno area but also studying the medicinal properties of the plants and learning about the peasant customs related to beliefs in the power of nature. It was not long before she also became a true expert in the area of preparing and preserving plants, due to which she was asked for her input in the preparation of a funeral wreath for Adam Mickiewicz in 1890.[52] In her "field excursions," the writer would collect plants that she then dried and arranged into meticulous compositions. The result of her work was the *Herbarium of Eliza Orzeszkowa,*[53]

50 Ibid., p. 129

51 Alina Kowalczykowa writes more extensively on Żeromski's conscious use of botanical names in "Finał – 'Przedwiośnie,'" in *Żeromski w Niepodległej*, p. 176.

52 See Monika Paś, *Dąb i laur. Wieńce poświęcone Adamowi Mickiewiczowi*, exhibition catalogue for *Dąb i Laur. Wieńce poświęcone Adamowi Mickiewiczowi*, National Museum in Krakow, Nov. 25, 2005–Jan. 31, 2006.

53 The title was inscribed by hand by the herbarium's author. Appearing on the lower right is the herbarium's subtitle: *Z pól, łąk i lasów nadniemeńskich miejscowości: Miniewicze, Poniżany, Heldowicze, Kowszów, Poniemuń, Horny, Kołpaki* [From the fields, meadows and forests of Nemen-area towns: Miniewicze, Poniżany, Heldowicze, Kowszów, Poniemuń, Horny, Kołpaki]. In 2004, the *Herbarium of Eliza Orzeszkowa* was published by Kontekst, based in Poznań, prepared and edited by Anna Maria Kielak. Anna Maria Kielak, *Zielnik Elizy Orzeszkowej. Nieznany zabytek botaniczny przechowywany w zbiorach PTPN* (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Kontekst, 2004).

a hardbound album in blue canvas containing specimens of 280 plants labeled with their Polish and Belarusian folk names and their corresponding scientific names in Latin. That collection, envisioned by the author as a document of the region's cultural heritage, was shown publically for the first time on March 7, 1911, at a meeting of the Department of Naturalists and Technicians of the Society of the Friends of Science in Poznań, to whom the *Herbarium* would eventually be donated by an heir of Orzeszkowa's after her death.[54]

It is difficult to ascertain whether the public display of the Polish author's botanical work could have had a direct influence on Rosa Luxemburg's decision to start making her own plant arrangements; her letters lack any mention of her event. We can, however, be certain that the empirical and ethnographic passions were linked to her fascination with the multifaceted work of Johann Wolfgang Goethe, her favorite poet and thinker, and a writer of theses on color theory, anatomy and morphology, minerology and geology, and botany and zoology. Goethe also happened to be the owner of one of the three best rock collections in all of Europe,[55] and the creator of an herbarium containing many exceptional specimens collected on his extensive travels. While in prison, Luxemburg repeatedly talked about Goethe's poetry, pointing to its cleansing and soothing influence in the face of the mounting crisis she found herself in: "At times of profound agitation the effect is almost physiological, as if when parched with thirst I had been given a precious drink to cool my body and restore my mind."[56]

54 Monika Paś, "Pamiątka botanicznych zamiłowań Elizy Orzeszkowej w zbiorach Muzeum Narodowego w Krakowie," *Rozprawy Muzeum Narodowego w Krakowie* 6 (2013), pp. 243–56, www.mnk.pl/images/upload/o-muzeum/wydawnictwa/rozprawy/tom%20VI/09_Pas_25–10.pdf.

55 Wolfram Voigt and Ulrich Sucker, *Johann Wolfgang von Goethe als Naturwissenschaftler* (BSB B.G. Teubner Verlagsgesellschaft, Leipzig, 1982), p. 23.

56 Rosa Luxemburg, *Prison Letters to Sophie Liebknecht*, Square One Pamphlets (London: Independent Labour Party, 1972), p. 17.

Research on the context for the creation of Luxemburg's herbarium is the basis for treating the extraordinary picture atlas not only as the product of her passion for the natural world but also, and perhaps above all, as something of an account of her experience of the Great War. The herbarium is a culmination and reflection of her fate as a female revolutionist who yearned to leave her mark on the course of history but was deprived of the chance to work for a society built on liberty and democracy, one that opposed all forms of violence and guaranteed lasting peace.[57] Actively involved in political affairs in the period leading up to 1914, Luxemburg spent nearly the entire duration of World War I in complete isolation from the outside world. Her charisma, polemical temperament, and rhetorical skills, which she wielded as expertly in her speeches as in her writing, were shuttered. All that was left for her to do was read books and write letters, both of which were subject to strict military censorship; she was allowed one monthly visit with a friend or relative under close supervision by the guards. Though her first stint in the Berlin prison spawned the famous *Junius Pamphlet* (smuggled out by Mathilde Jacob), and though in the Wronki prison she wrote two revolutionary articles that were published in May 1917 in *Spartakusbrief*,[58] it was nonetheless Luxemburg's herbarium that emerged as a record of her life as an inmate and, being constructed around meticulously preserved remains of organic matter, constitutes a document of the revolutionist's long exile in forced isolation from her private and political life.

It is no wonder then that, along with the plants she had collected in Sudety and the Alps while still free, nearly half of the herbarium comprises plants found at the sites of her incarceration—"the prison vegetable garden or the lazaretto flower

57 See Annelies Laschitza, "R. Luxemburg – Persönlichkeit, Leben und Werk im aktuellen Disput," in *Rosa Luxemburgs Tod*, p. 17. Thus describing the socialist society, which Luxemburg espoused, Laschitza also points out the significance of environmental protection in that social project.

58 "Der alte Maulwurf" and "Zwei Osterbotschaften," *Spartacus* no. 5, May 1917.

bed"[59]—or of flowers given to her by visitors or sent in letters by her closest friends: Sophie Liebknecht,[60] Luisa Kautsky,[61] and especially Mathilde Jacob.[62] The latter played a particularly important role in the preservation of Rosa Luxemburg's legacy. From 1913 to 1919, she was her secretary and confidant, and after Luxemburg's death, the guardian of all that she left behind: her work, letters, dried plants, and other objects. Jacob also preserved a secret collection of documents from the Spartacus League, the underground organization that eventually became the Communist Party of Germany, which Jacob buried in the ground near present-day Strachocin according to Luxemburg's instructions.[63] Jacob revealed the existence of this "treasure" in a letter dated September 14, 1939, to professor Ralph H. Lutz, the director of the Hoover Institution, a center

59 Werblan-Jakubiec and Dolatowski, "Komentarz do zielnika Róży Luksemburg," p. 9.

60 Sophie Liebknecht was married to Karl Liebknecht, a German socialist who was cofounder with Luxemburg of the Spartacus League.

61 In her letter May 19, 1917 letter to Sophie Liebknecht, Luxemburg writes: "Luisa Kautsky visited me today. As a parting gift she gave me some forget-me-nots and some pansies. They've all settled themselves in so nicely; I can hardly believe my eyes, for this is the first time in my life I ever did any planting outside. By Whitsuntide I shall have such a lot of flowers under my window!" Rosa Luxemburg, *Prison Letters*, p. 10.

62 "I owe you many thanks for the flowers," Luxemburg wrote on April 9, 1915 to Mathilde from the prison in Barnimstrasse. "You do not know how great a service you have done me. I can now once again occupy myself with botany, my great passion and my greatest respite." Rosa Luxemburg, *Das Herbarium 1913–1918*, Bibliotheca Augustana, www.hsaugsburg.de/~harsch/germanica/Chronologie/20Jh/Luxemburg/ lux_herb.html#f01. In late May, she writes to Mathilde: "I am not allowed to receive flowers that often, nor such long letters. Surely you can sense that these verses are not dictated by my heart but rather by the regulations." In Heinz Knobloch, *Meine liebste Mathilde*, p. 48. What survives of the correspondence (some of it unpublished) between Rosa Luxemburg and Mathilde Jacob are 153 letters, of which 148 are from prison. The letters currently reside at the Archiv der sozialen Demokratie der Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung; many fragments of them have been reprinted in Heinz Knobloch's book, thanks to which we can deduce how greatly important flower collecting had been for Rosa Luxemburg during her incarceration.

63 Knobloch, *Meine liebste Mathilde*, pp. 230–33.

for historical documentation at Stanford University. When Lutz had appeared at her apartment in Berlin a few months prior, he saw many priceless materials left behind by Rosa Luxemburg, which he took back to the United States before the outbreak of World War II. Perhaps it was Lutz's doing that among the items saved from destruction—in addition to letters, notes, books, and furniture—was Luxemburg's herbarium. Unlike the buried "communist archive," which in short order found itself behind the iron curtain, never to be seen again, the eighteen notebooks with plant illustrations managed to survive both world wars.

According to Knobloch, in her correspondence with Mathilde Jacob, Luxemburg had intended to devise a secret code to be used for communicating instructions concerning political decisions, a code based on specific books, pamphlets, particular words, and literary references. Though no one has been able to decipher the code to date, it is said that important political messages had been concealed even in the numerous flower bouquets sent to Luxemburg by Jacob.[64] That possibility, albeit purely speculative, begs for a new perspective on Luxemburg's dried-flower arrangements and accompanying notes. More often than not, the plants were laid out with a strong sense of composition, exhibiting a sensitivity for the color, texture, and physical condition of the specimens. At times, flower petals are supplemented with carefully rendered, lightly sketched drawings of stems and leaves; in other instances, damaged plants have their missing parts sketched in. There are also pages where the plants are glued in carelessly and haphazardly. The seven "wartime notebooks" also contain notations that can be read as political meanings in addition to being a sure indication of the emotional state of the herbarium's creator. In a detailed description of the leaves and buds of a plant identified as a "Ponsetta" (with two added question

64 Ibid., p. 106. See also Ralph H. Lutz, "Rosa Luxemburg's Unpublished Prison Letters 1916–18," in *Journal of Central European Affairs* 24, 31 (1963), pp. 303–13.

marks),[65] for example, there is an unexpected notation reading "yellow stamp on the side (?)" In an entry from August 2, 1918, the fourth anniversary of Germany declaring war on Russia, there is an arrangement showing a thuja branch, which lacks the plant's name and description, stating only the specimen's collection site: "from Lasalle's grave." Meanwhile, an entry on September 29, 1918 entry of a "Judenkirsche," whose name translates to "Jewish cherry,"[66] is accompanied by a description stating "casings from which the fruit has been removed," closing notebook sixteen in a rather symbolic fashion not long before Luxemburg was released from prison.

The letters to friends from prison constitute something of a complement to, and at the same time a mirror image of, the herbarium Luxemburg made at that time. These two records—the first being a verbal account of everyday prison life; the other, a material-remains archive of experiences in politically induced isolation—engender mutually illuminating interpretations. Both conjure an image of the revolutionist as a sensitive and thoughtful individual prone to states of almost melodramatic exaltation; a person harboring a strong connection to nature often made manifest in her attempts to understand the experiences and emotions of animals: "But now I have myself grown to be like King Solomon; I too can understand the language of birds and beasts. Not, of course, as if they were using articulate speech, but I understand the most varied shades of meaning and of feeling conveyed by their tones."[67] In these words Luxemburg expressed the need to transcend the anthropological approach, which too strongly relies on a false perception of animals as transparent objects imprinted only with human

65 Surely she is referring to a poinsettia, popularly known as the Star of Bethlehem.

66 In German, "Judenkirsche" is the common name of physalis, also called Inca berry.

67 Luxemburg, *Prison Letters*, p. 12.

Fig. 4: Rosa Luxemburg's herbarium, notebook No. 16.

meaning.[68] Describing the reactions, behaviors, forms of companionship, and culture of the birds and insects she encountered in and around prison, Luxemburg emphasized their actual causative role as autonomous entities—as feeling, reacting, and thinking beings. Although she can recognize a kind of mimetic cruelty and insurmountable violence existing in both realities, she is convinced about animal culture being independent from man's:

> Last spring, I was returning from a country walk when, in the quiet, empty road, I noticed a small dark patch on the ground. Leaning forward I witnessed a voiceless tragedy. A large beetle was lying on its back and waving its legs helplessly, while a crowd of little ants were swarming round it and eating it alive! I was horror stricken, so I took my pocket handkerchief and began to flick the little brutes away. They were so bold and stubborn that it took me some time, and when at length I had freed the poor wretch of a beetle and had carried it to a safe distance on the grass, two of its legs had already been gnawed off [...] I fled from the scene feeling that in the end I had conferred a very doubtful boon.[69]

Her effort to see the experience of animals from their point of view can be interpreted as a sign of Luxemburg's attempts to "record the history of the Other"; to arrive at a more complex picture of reality characterized by a decentralized perspective and the allowance of an expanded narrative.[70] ("Sometimes, however, it seems to me that I am not really a human being at all but like a bird or a beast in human form."[71])

Luxemburg's prison reading on phytogeography and zoogeography also led her to contemplate the politics of nature,

68 See Éric Baratay, *Le Point de vue animal. Une autre version de l'histoire* (Paris: Le Seuil, 2012), p. 29.
69 Luxemburg, *Prison Letters*, p. 9.
70 Baratay, *Le Point de vue animal*, p. 43.
71 Ibid., pp. 8–9.

and especially to realize in the anthropocentric postulate of existence the radical differentiation made between animals and humans and its legitimization of man's dominion over the Other. Writing, for example, on the disappearance of songbirds from Germany as a consequence of the country's forest management policy, she put forth a rather unexpected analogy between the near extinction of the birds in Germany and of the Indians in North America. In doing so, she also observes that in a similar manner as the "habitat and food sources" of small animals are destroyed by humans, the "Redskins of North America [...], just like the birds [...], have been gradually driven from their hunting grounds by civilized men."[72]

In personal statements made by Luxemburg, who strove to ensure equality to the disenfranchised and to grant a place among the Others to the species with which man shares the earth, there are even fragments in which she makes reference to the ongoing war. The war encroached on the prison grounds, revealing the mechanical dimension of violence and its reproduction. Luxemburg describes how the courtyard used by inmates would suddenly fill up with military vehicles heaped with sacks of used soldiers' uniforms and shirts, often stained with blood: "They are sent to the women's cells to be mended, and then go back for use in the army."[73] Though private correspondence was subject to tight censorship, there are several instances in which Luxemburg did not hesitate to reiterate her political beliefs in an overt and emphatic manner.

> I have the feeling that all this moral filth through which we are wading, this huge madhouse in which we live, may all of a sudden, between one day and the next, be transformed into its very opposite, as if by the stroke of a magician's wand; may become something stupendously

72 Luxemburg, *Prison Letters*, p. 8.
73 Ibid., p. 23.

> great and heroic; must inevitably be so transformed, if only the war lasts a few years longer …[74]

It is hard not to notice in this passage the author's yearning to renew her faith in the vitality of a revolutionary mass—in the "strong, educated, ready proletariat"[75] she wrote about in the *Junius Pamphlet*. "[M]y interest in organic nature is almost morbid in its intensity,"[76] she confides in Sophie Liebknecht in a letter dated May 12, 1918, written during her time in the Wrocław prison. Gathering plants and preserving the organic matter in a series of illustrations compiled in album form certainly constituted for Luxemburg a kind of substitute for the work she was unable to do during the war, but it was also an attempt to stimulate her interest in the possibilities of political engagement, temporarily halted not just by imprisonment but by the war, which was not an option for her as a pacifist. Direct contact with nature was at once a form of defense against withering away and a fight for survival in captivity, which she described as causing a "dull sense of oppression in the head"[77] and the feeling of being "already entombed."[78] Her involvement with organic matter—collecting and growing plants and her concern for animals—allowed her to eliminate, or at least drown out, the ever-increasing sense of her own imminent death. The yard of the lazaretto on Barnimstrasse, where she could "make some new little discovery in botany or zoology,"[79] or her observation of the poplar seeds sprouting "like weeds from all the crannies on the wall and from between the paving stones"[80] in the Wronki compound, gave her hope of another life beyond the walls, whereas

74 Ibid., p. 20.
75 Luxemburg, *The Crisis*, p. 126.
76 Luxemburg, *Prison Letters*, p. 28.
77 Ibid., p. 14.
78 Ibid., p. 22.
79 Ibid., p. 18.
80 Ibid., p. 14.

the absence of all greenery in the "great paved yard" of the Wrocław prison only exacerbated her feelings of isolation and hopelessness.

> As I go to and fro, I keep my eyes riveted on the gray paving-stones to spare myself the sight of the prisoners at work in the yard. It hurts me to see them in their ignoble prison dress, and there are always a few among them in whom the individual traits of age and sex seem to have been obliterated beneath an imprint of the extremity of human degradation.[81]

Perhaps that yearning for life, which Luxemburg preserved through her exploration and contemplation of the organic world, inspired her radical decision to return to Berlin just after her release from prison on November 8, 1918, and to immediately get involved in the November Revolution, the Socialist uprising against the monarchy. "You know that I really hope to die at my post, in a street fight or in prison"[82]—these words from a letter of May 2, 1917, to the wife of Karl Liebknecht proved to be prophetic. On January 15, 1919, the leaders of the Spartacus League were apprehended by police for their involvement in the worker's uprising in Berlin, after which they were handed over to officers of Freikorps, the right-wing paramilitary army, and murdered. Leaving the Eden Hotel, where the interrogations were being conducted, Rosa Luxemburg was knocked unconscious by a blow to the head from the butt of Otto Runge's rifle, put into a car, and shortly thereafter, shot dead by Lieutenant Hermann W. Souchon.[83]

81 Ibid., p. 18.
82 Ibid., p. 9.
83 Ultimately, the charge was brought against Capt. Waldemar Pabst, who, at the behest of Gustav Noske, interrogated the leaders of the Spartacus League at the Eden Hotel on Kurfürstendamm and then gave the order to have them murdered. See Klaus Gietinger, *Eine Leiche im Landwehrkanal. Die Ermordung der Rosa L.* (Mainz: Decaton Verlag, 1993).

The deaths of Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht went down as the founding myth of the KPD (Communist Party of Germany), and their funeral kicked off the commemorative ritual for the victims of the Spartacist uprising of January 1919. The burial was initially planned to be at the Berlin-Friedrichshain cemetery, where the graves of March 1848 revolutionists were located. Nevertheless, city officials denied that option, suggesting instead the Friedrichsfeld cemetery, where Karl Liebknecht's father, Wilhelm, was buried. The casualties of the January uprising, however, were not granted spots on the hilltop but rather on the peripheries, referred to by the locals as "criminals' corner." The funeral was held on January 15, 1919, and quickly escalated into a workers' demonstration. The revolutionists were interred in a collective grave, at the center of which lay the coffin of Karl Liebknecht, right next to the empty spot awaiting the coffin of Rosa Luxemburg, who was officially buried on June 13, 1919. The monument commemorating the victims of the revolution, designed by Mies van der Rohe and unveiled on the sixth anniversary of Luxemburg's burial, was until 1933 the epicenter of political demonstrations organized by the KPD.[84] The Nazi regime gradually eliminated the communists' sacred ground: they began by removing the hammer and sickle, then they dismantled the entire monument, and finally, as reported in the press, removed the "foreign body" from the ground and turned the site into a park.[85] Rosa Luxemburg's grave was once again empty, the space previously occupied by her body taken over by organic matter—the world of plants.

84 Jan Kohlmann writes in detail on the commemorative rituals at the graves of Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht: Jan Kohlmann, *Der Marsch zu den Gräbern von Karl und Rosa. Geschichte eines Gedenktages* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2004). See also Barbara Könczöl, *Märtyrer des Sozialismus. Die SED und das Gedenken an Rosa Luxemburg und Karl Liebknecht* (Frankfurt am Main: Campus Verlag, 2008).

85 See Jürgen Hofmann, "Das Grab der Rosa Luxemburg. Eine Spurensuche auf dem Zentralfriedhof Friedrichsfelde," in *Rosa Luxemburgs Tod*, p. 85.

The reconstruction of the revolutionist's posthumous fate reveals the process of the ritualization of death, specifically the importance of the moment of the body's identification to the obviation of the semiotic crisis triggered by death. The corpse itself, assures Louis-Vincent Thomas, is meaningless: "an empty signifier functioning without the phenomenal subject."[86] In his seminal thanatology text, *Le cadavre*, Thomas traces the transition from biology to anthropology, uncovering the way in which the imagination imposes itself on the biological reality of the dead body and how the corpse becomes a convergence point of a great many phantasms.[87] Meanwhile, Jean-Didier Urbain believes that only the coffin can symbolically shift the body-corpse opposition (*l'opposition corps-cadavre*) in favor of the former so that the body (*le corps*), once contained by the coffin, takes the place of the corpse (*le cadavre*).[88] The coffin becomes the site of death's neutralization: hiding the corpse, it exposes the buried body as the cultural body, which is more certain than the biological one—unlike the biological body, it is not subject to decay, a process that also entails the disintegration of meaning and semiotic structures. Inherent to the process of endowing the deceased with new meaning is thus the need to reinstate the body's integrity by way of a burial. The corpse must become the body—a representation of the corpse—as well as a sovereign entity divorced from decaying matter. Only in this way can it once again become an active subject.

From the anthropological perspective, the lack of organic matter attributable to a given individual—remains that can be endowed with an identity—stifles the transition from living body to dead body, a process that is fundamental to the process of the deceased's symbolization. The absence of an identifiable

86 Louis-Vincent Thomas, *Le cadavre. De la biologie à l'anthropologie* (Brussells: Éditions Complexe, 1980).
87 Ibid., p. 51
88 Jean-Didier Urbain, *La societé de conservation. Étude sémiologique des cimetières d'Occident* (Paris: Payot, 1978), p. 61.

body also imposes significant interference with the necrography of the individual. This is well illustrated by the case of Rosa Luxemburg, where the engine that keeps her memory moving has been the recurrent crisis involving the inability to conclusively identify her body. As a consequence, the absence of organic remains has elevated the importance and relevance of all the other material remains—her personal objects, shreds of clothing, photos, and, as it turns out, dried plants.

Thus wherever the crisis of the "real" body emerges is where the force of the necroperformance is released, mediated by the material remains of the absent body's impact. Necroperformance does not concern itself with the subject—here it is just the remains, the leftovers, that make an impact on the living. In the case of necroperformance, it seems that what living people do with remains is just as relevant as what the dead remains do to the living. Necroperformance thus documents what was unrealized, overlooked, or was politically or historically marginalized in the writing of the deceased's story.

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Necroperformance: The Cultural Reconstruction of the War Body is an attempt to reconstruct in Polish cultural memory the people, works, ideas, events, and identities that are not necessarily a part of the well-known and widely accepted scenarios of our social life, and which often do not fit into the cultural performances perceived by the living. But all of these do leave behind *traces*, which are here understood not only as organic remains—for example, bones—but also as any form of material left behind that testifies to the prior existence of these people, works, ideas, events, and identities. These—often repressed—dead remnants of history demand to be brought back into the present, to be revived, in order to become a part of a different version of history.

Searching for traces of memory in precarious bodies inflicted with the violence of war, I ask readers to acknowledge the fragility of life and to reinforce an attitude of respect for the right to live. So this book is also an attempt to retrieve the pacifist and emancipatory threads of the "theatre of the Great War" from the convoluted and largely repressed history of Polish-German relations at the threshold of the 20th century, for which Rosa Luxemburg is an emblematic figure. In the *Junius Pamphlet* she elaborated an inspiring vocabulary, which reflects on the aesthetic dimension of the politics of war and the political potential of aesthetics. For Luxemburg, the connection between theatre and war was above all a crucial metaphor for describing the illusory character of capitalist progress: "The show is over. The curtain has fallen on trains filled with reservists, as they pulled out amid the joyous cries of enthusiastic maidens."[89] But also she tried to find a way of transforming "the bestiality of [imperialist] action" into "the readiness of the proletarian masses to act in the fight against imperialism."[90] My book is an attempt to study the extent to which her diagnosis of the outbreak of World War I as a moment when "the scene has thoroughly changed," and of the war itself as a "world drama,"[91] constitutes not only a commentary on the social drama prompted by the war but also concerns the radical transformations in stage productions at that time. After all, theatre, on account of its communal character, is a significant medium of social life and uniquely manifests and at the same time comments on our own culture, politics, and history.

Theatre is therefore treated here as a metamedium, but also as an art form inherently contaminated with a "deferred" death in the face of avant-garde artistic practices; and as a residual art form that feeds opportunistically on other media—

89 Luxemburg, *The Crisis*, p. 7.
90 Ibid., pp. 21, 123.
91 Ibid., p. 7.

photography, film, visual arts, literature, music, and dance. The focus on the relationship between social drama and stage drama, as well as on theatricality as an element essential to a variety of artistic practices, makes it possible to accentuate those aspects of the necrography in which the key element is not so much the actual deceased person but rather the performative effect of remains permeating cultural and social performances. The active influence of the dead on the living is what I call *necro-performance*, and is best encapsulated by cultural reconstructions of the means and conditions of the actualization of past events. So relevant to me not only are those moments, in which the living decide which versions of the past and which images of history have an impact on them, but also the moments in which the remnants regain their autonomy, spurring unforeseen and unexpected transformations in a given collective.

Building on that picture, I look back at Polish and German social and artistic performances of the early 20th century to follow in their traces the tendencies, themes, and problems that make it possible—as Rosa Luxemburg wrote—to hear after a display of jingoism "the bestial chorus of war agitators and the hoarse cry of capitalist hyenas,"[92] and to see how, befallen by violence, "cities are turned into shambles, whole countries into deserts, villages into cemeteries, whole nations into beggars, churches into stables; popular rights, treaties, alliances, the holiest words and the highest authorities have been torn into scraps."[93] Once again reenacting what was given over to death, theatre steeped in the experiences of the Great War reveals itself to be but a necroperformance, while at the same time it demonstrates the ambivalent meaning of the performative effect of remains. At times subservient to ideals that uphold the picture of bourgeoisie society as "we usually see it, playing the roles of peace and righteousness, of order, of philosophy, of ethics," the

92 Ibid., p. 128.
93 Ibid., p. 8.

theatre at other times shows capitalist society as it really is: "as a roaring beast, as an orgy of anarchy, as a pestilential breath, devastating culture and humanity."[94]

94 Ibid.

The Cultural Reconstruction of Theatre

The Modernization Front

In 2002 the Zachęta National Art Gallery in Warsaw presented Katarzyna Kozyra's *Święto wiosny* (*The Rite of Spring*), a seven-channel video installation taking as its starting point the legendary performance by Sergei Diaghilev's Ballets Russes, which premiered on May 29, 1913 at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées in Paris. Kozyra's work is a result of a double act of repetition: it is a looped video-reenactment of the ballet's barely four-minute-long climax, based on a meticulous 1987 restoration of the entire performance by the American choreographer Millicent Hodson and the British art historian Kenneth Archer.[1] Kozyra's *Rite of Spring*, which she began working on in 1999, was in part inspired by a television documentary on the reconstruction of the ballet's lost score—a process described by Hodson as "reassembling scattered fragments"[2]—but was also born of the artist's fascination with modern rituals of death and decay. Like Hodson, who read *The Rite of Spring* as Nijinsky's "denial of the authority invested in modern civilization [... and] suggested a different set of social and psychological priorities,"[3] Kozyra demonstrated the sustained freshness of the choreography in depicting the paradoxes of contemporary society and showing the possibility of inverting cultural norms.

1 The details of the reconstruction are discussed by Millicent Hodson in "Choreograficzne układanki" and Kenneth Archer in "Przejmująca uczta dla oczu," in *Igor Strawiński, Święto wiosny. Wieczór baletowy w trzech częściach*, (Warsaw: Teatr Wielki – Opera Narodowa, 2011), pp. 36–39.

2 Millicent Hodson, "Choreograficzne układanki," p. 36.

3 Millicent Hodson, *Nijinsky's Crime against Grace: Reconstruction Score of the Original Choreography for 'Le Sacre du Printemps'* (Stuyvesant, New York: Pendragon Press, 1996), p. xix.

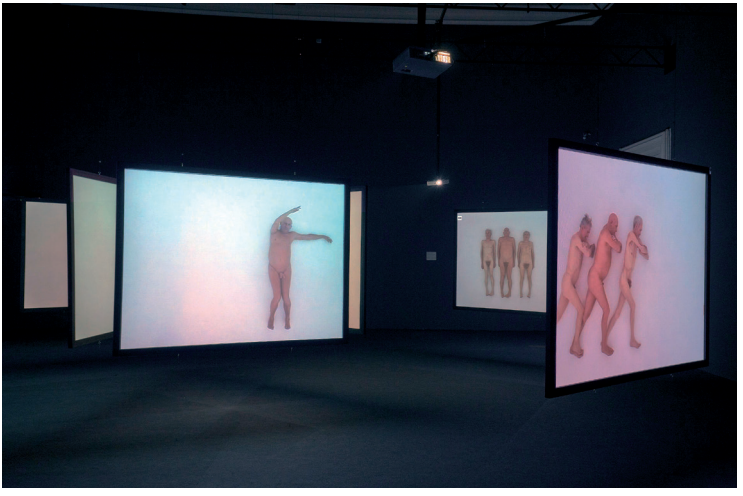

Fig. 5: Katarzyna Kozyra, Święto wiosny (*The Rite of Spring)*, video installation, Zachęta-National Gallery of Art in Warsaw.

Seven screens were set up in an arrangement that imitated the ritual circle from Nijinsky's final scene, the "Glorification of the Chosen One," and at the same time mirrored the geometry of the dancing bodies distinctive to his choreography. Projected in a continuous loop onto the outer surfaces of the screens were the dances of the Ancestors, and on the surfaces inside the circle, the dance of the Chosen One. The figures of three men playing the Ancestors and two women and one man as the Chosen One moved and constantly reappeared on the huge white screens, evoking a sense of symmetry and cyclicality from the meeting of two basic forms—a square and a circle. To enter the dimly lit space, vibrant with a repeating fragment of Igor Stravinsky's music and alive with the motion of the images surging from the shadows, was to undergo a transformation from a passive viewer to a participant in this mediatized ritual. Kozyra had former dancers from the Teatr Wielki-Opera Narodowa in Warsaw (Great Theatre–National Opera) learn the choreography from the Hodson/Archer reconstruction and perform it naked for

her video camera. The ages of the two female and three male dancers ranged from 70 to 94. Since the repetition of the highly complex movements was impossible for the elderly bodies, Kozyra decided to make a stop-motion movie, employing technological means to create an illusion of dancing bodies. Using the technique in which objects are physically manipulated and photographed hundreds of thousands of times, frame by frame, in order to achieve an illusion of movement, Kozyra placed, moved, and composed the bodies of the dancers. For the projection, the photographic stills were reanimated—edited together into sequences echoing the motions devised by Nijinsky. "I felt as if I were using corpses and not people,"[4] said the artist about her process of bringing to life Vaclav Nijinsky's choreography through the bodies of the senior performers. The resurrected choreography was performed in an altogether different medium and with a different approach to the dancers' bodies, but the effect of "dancing to death" was similarly disturbing.

Kozyra's focus on a repetitive sequence of motions meant that the visual field became free of the theatricality associated with plot, set design, and costume—elements that obscure critical reflection on the essence of dance and physical motion. Kozyra executed not only a radical reduction of the original adaptation but also a defragmentation of Nijinsky's choreographic routine, which significantly altered the sense of Nijinsky's original scenic structures. Nijinsky had his performers dancing sideways, transferring the body's entire weight onto one side, executing hefty hops with bent knees and landing on pigeon-toed feet with arms extended and head turned sideways; Kozyra achieved the visual effect of the exhausting dance using the animated film, which reoriented the positioning of the dancers, who appeared to perform fragments of Nijinsky's choreography while lying down on a white ballet floor.

4 Katarzyna Kozyra, *Casting* (Warsaw: Zachęta National Gallery of Art, 2010), p. 148.

By utilizing stop-motion techniques, Kozyra demonstrated the artist's power to take advantage of the tools at their disposal to manipulate performers and impose her will on the bodies of others. In Kozyra's *Rite of Spring*, the performers' bodies were blatantly controlled by the medium, which allowed for a deliberate display of their "imperfections" and of their embodied history as former Great Theatre–National opera dancers.[5] The naked bodies, altered by the passage of time, thus became a means of articulating not only biological change but also the discipline associated with the practice of ballet, which unapologetically favors youth and agility. In Kozyra's *Rite of Spring*, the quick and rather choppy editing lent the depicted bodies a quivering, exhausted, and sometimes simply spastic quality. The looping videos of the aged bodies allowed for a mounting sense of detachment, but also scripted a rather ironic and critical commentary on modern society and its manipulation of individuals, forcing them into prescribed roles and segregating them as Others.

Not only were the performers' aging bodies set in motion through the use of technology, they were also reassigned gender. The dancers had prosthetics imitating genitals attached to their naked bodies—male organs for the women and female organs for the men, with the sole exception being a male dancer portraying the Chosen One. This overt gender masquerade certainly introduced some considerable interference into the ritual being reconstructed while also challenging the absoluteness of sexual dimorphism.[6] In this manner, Kozyra's installation becomes a critical reflection on the experience of modernity as addressed in the original production of *The Rite*

5 See "Taniec Wybranej. Z Katarzyną Kozyrą rozmawia Artur Żmijewski," in *Katarzyna Kozyra, Święto wiosny / Frühlingsopfer* (Warsaw: Zachęta National Gallery of Art, 2002), p. 26.

6 See Jarosław Lubiak, "Jaką dziś założyć płeć?," in *Odmiany odmieńca. Mniejszościowe orientacje seksualne w perspektywie gender*, ed. Tomasz Basiuk, Dominika Ferens, Tomasz Sikora (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Śląsk, 2002), p. 78.

of Spring; an experience dominated by two areas of discourse at the very heart of modernity—anthropology and psychoanalysis.[7] The strategy for unmasking the violence of the debates raging at that time within and between both of these fields, which by the authority of science legitimize otherness and difference, turns out to be a mechanized ritual derived from the archive of avant-garde art, a necroperformance carried out by a contemporary artist with the remains of modernity—circulating signs and images as mere prosthetics of identity.

In the book *Rites of Spring*: *The Great War and the Birth of the Modern Age*, a groundbreaking work on the ties between the avant-garde and Western modernity's distinctive culture of violence, Modris Eksteins defines the premiere of the Nijinsky ballet as the "source event" for European modernism. Emerging from that performance was the basic paradox of modernity rooted in the "striving for freedom" and simultaneously for "the power of ultimate destruction."[8] Eksteins shows the fundamental change that took place in ballet—an art of representation—after Stravinsky's music for *The Rite of Spring*, which relied on long sequences of repeated dissonant and sharply accented chords with a particular pulsing rhythm capable of directly penetrating the listener's subconscious. Nijinsky's revolutionary choreography had a similar effect on the way in which theatre was experienced, moving it from a medium to be watched from a distance to one that is excessive and has an affective impact on the community of spectators. Abandoning the practice of tethering the dance to the melody and handing it over to the rhythm, Nijinsky created a dance fundamentally opposed to

7 In interpreting Kozyra's work, Jarosław Lubiak treats anthropology and psychoanalysis as two conflicting theoretical discourses. In my view, psychoanalysis and anthropology constitute two compatible scholarly discourses in the formation of the paradigm of modernity. See ibid., p. 76.

8 Modris Eksteins, *Rites of Spring: The Great War and the Birth of the Modern Age* (Boston, Mass: Houghton Mifflin, 1989), p. xiv.

natural human motion but able to express the inner self and the growing social disintegration of the period.

The non-balletic movement from some imagined "primitive" ritual had the dancers "hunched over, hammering their feet into the floorboards" as Joan Acocella describes it: "The approach was analytic, the look 'ugly,' the emotions discomforting."[9] Eksteins convincingly shows that this particular artistic event may be treated as a manifestation of the individual's experience of modernity, which is rooted in a constant negotiation between self and Other. After all, the archaic Slavs presented in the ballet played the role of such an Other, as construed by the Western Europeans, who rose to the challenge to offer up a performance of radical otherness. Though the Russian ballet provoked the anticipated scandal, both among artists and the cognoscenti, and among their audience and the general society, the French were charmed by this example of Eastern European exotica. However, it actually found its fullest resonance within German culture. In the country of Nietzsche's heirs, where *The Rite of Spring* was performed under a telling title betraying the ritualistic nature of the event—*Frühlingsopfer* (Spring Sacrifice)—a unique convergence of aesthetics and politics elevated vitalism to a sort of new secular religion. The most violent manifestation of the politics of paroxysm was, of course, the Great War, which led to the collapse of the old European order as well as to the emancipation of underdeveloped and peripheral nations: the Russian Revolution broke out in October 1917; in 1918 the Habsburg monarchy fractured into sovereign nation states, enabling the rise of independent Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia; and in 1919 the Weimar Republic arose out of the Deutsches Reich.

It is well known that the democratization of Europe after World War I was accompanied by a surge in nationalistic sentiments. Yet, Eksteins believes that fascism and Nazism proved

9 Joan Acocella, "Secrets of Nijinsky," http://www.nybooks.com/articles/1999/01/14/secrets-of-nijinsky/.

to be not so much reactionary movements but rather the expression of that same modernity: a set of changes, abounding in vitality, energy, and dynamics, that were a reaction to the general sense of decadence and degeneration in Western culture. Evidence of this can be seen in the ease with which avant-garde patterns such as visions of totality or the aestheticization of the social and political reality were adopted for the purpose of building a nation state—a phenomenon most apparent in German culture, which the author of *Rites of Spring* believed to be "at the heart of the 'modern experience.'"[10] Eksteins, however, is less interested in the process of art's politicization after World War I than in the aestheticization of politics. He underscores the close ties between theatre and politics as evidenced by Wagner's *Gesamtkunstwerk* and German *Kultur*, the link between intense performance practice and the modern nation state, corresponding to an idea formulated simultaneously by Norbert Elias.[11] Retracing the history of the sociopolitical shift

10 Eksteins, *Rites of Spring*, p. 68. As the most extreme manifestation of the radicalization of the avant-garde in the spirit of national socialism, the exhibition *Entartete Kunst* was the largest work of fascist propaganda. The exhibition gathered art deemed to be a symptom of "degeneration," by representatives of "cultural Bolshevism" and the "Jewish empire," as the top European avant-garde artists were called. Opening on July 19, 1937, in Munich and later traveling to 12 other German cities, the exhibition comprised 650 works of art confiscated from 32 German museums and featured more than 100 outstanding European exponents of impressionism, expressionism, Dadaism, new objectivity, surrealism, fauvism, and cubism. The fact that by April 1941 the exhibition had been viewed by three million people meant that, paradoxically, this ideologically driven show was history's largest ever exhibition of modern art. In 1991 the *Entartete Kunst* exhibition was revisited in a German-American exhibition in Los Angeles as a critical point in the fate of the avant-garde in Nazi Germany. *Degenerate Art: The Fate of the Avant-Garde in Nazi Germany*, ed. Stephanie Barron, exh. cat. (Los Angeles and Munich: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Deutsches Historisches Museum, Hirmer Verlag, 1992).

11 Norbert Elias, "'Cultural history' and 'Political History,'" in Norbert Elias, *Studies on the Germans: Power Struggles and the Development of Habitus in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, trans. Eric Dunning, Stephen Mennell (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 1996). The German edition of the book was published in 1989.

in the German nationalist habitus, Elias arrived at the conclusion that since politics had ceased to be the domain of sovereign entities and became a territory for the activity of sovereign collectives, it was thus necessary to devise ritualized and highly theatricalized means of expressing the idea of belonging to the community. A key role in this process of reintegration was given not to language-based symbols but rather to cultural spectacle and social performance: demonstrations, state ceremonies, funerals.

We can thus state that while the birth of the 19th century in Germany was accompanied by Hegel's conviction that *drama* represents "a product of a national life that has already developed to cultural maturity,"[12] in the year 1914, closing the long 19th century,[13] the greatest manifestation of German culture was theatre. In this opposition between drama and theatre we can detect—as if in a fractured mirror—the reflection of a distinction that was at the heart of the German identity taking shape at the time, namely that of culture (German) versus civilization (Western). The opposition of *Kultur* and *Zivilisation*, a conflict whose roots lay in German Romanticism, reached its apogee in the ideological conflicts of World War I, in a series of publications titled *Die Ideen von 1914*.[14] This antithesis became politicized and nationalized as much by French and English intellectuals, who treated the war as a defense of civilization from the militarized, barbaric Wilhelmine Reich (for example,

12 *Hegel, on the Arts: Selections from G.W.F. Hegel's Aesthetics, or the Philosophy of the Fine Art*, ed. and trans. Henry Paolucci (Lewisville, N. Car.: Griffon House, 2001), p. 173.

13 Eric Hobsbawm writes about the long 19th century of 1789–1914, in his trilogy: *The Age of Revolution, Europe 1789–1848* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1962); *The Age of Capital: 1848–1875* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1975) and *The Age of Empire 1875–1914* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1987).

14 The series included, among other titles, *Die Ideen von 1914* by Rudolf Kjellen (1915), *Händler und Helden* by Werner Sombart (1915), *Der Krieg und die geistigen Entscheidungen* by Georg Simmel (1917), and *Reflections of a Nonpolitical Man* by Thomas Mann (1918).

Henri Bergson and Gilbert Chesterton), as by representatives of German humanities and arts. Perhaps the most prominent exponent of this idea was the German writer Thomas Mann, who elaborated its antagonistic model in both his *Thoughts in Wartime*, published just after the outbreak of the war (in August/September 1914), and in his war-era *Reflections of a Nonpolitical Man* (written from 1915 to 1918 and released in 1918), supplementing the opposition of culture and civilization with material addressing the decadence and rationalism of the democratic West and the vitality and demonism of barbaric Germany, as well as the cleansing and cathartic effect of war.

Set on the eve of the 20th century's first cultural catastrophe, *The Rite of Spring* not only welcomed to the stage the main players of the Great War—Germany, Russia, and France—but also exposed the fact that the moderns were never really modern and that modernity itself was essentially the outcome of purification efforts based on an ever-repeating gesture of constructing the Other. Bruno Latour convincingly shows that the inability to abandon the "old anthropological matrix," according to which all of culture and all of nature mix with each other on a daily basis, not only prevented the onset of modernity but also revealed the insurmountable tension between subject and object.[15] Being a manifestation of colonial expansion by Europe's military superpowers and coinciding with an explosion of new scientific and technological discoveries, World War I became a drastic embodiment of modernism's ambivalence. In European societies' clear separation of the rational and irrational spheres at the threshold of the 20th century, in their creation of a distinction between civilization and culture, science and nature, identity and otherness, and finally between the human and inhuman, we can identify what Latour called the "modernizing front" that was so characteristic of anthropology as a truly

15 See Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press 1993), pp. 66–67.

modern field of study. After all, anthropology took it as a given that modernization is a process inherent to the Western world, a process, that enabled anthropology to present differences between cultures as objective scientific facts. As Latour argues:

> it was always in relation to that standard, defined by default, that the irrationality, or, more charitably, the alternative rationalities manifested by other cultures were judged. As respectful as anthropologists wanted to be of "the savage mind," it was from the starting point of "cultivated" or "learned" minds that they had to conceive of the difference.[16]

A way to overcome the "modernizing front" could be, as Latour suggests, an "anthropology of the moderns," being a sort of mission in search of the modes of existence of the moderns among themselves.[17] By preserving the anthropological model of jointly studying science, politics, and cultural practices, and by applying its tools to the analysis of Western culture (deprived of its hitherto privileges), a critical anthropology could arise that, instead of producing the Other, would study the Same throughout history.

The Myth of Theatre's Ephemerality

The Great War brought with it the birth of a new discipline of theatre arts, *Theaterwissenschaft*, meaning that the study of theatre also became part of the modern experience. Published in 1914 in Berlin was Max Herrmann's *Forschungen zur deutschen Theatergeschichte des Mittelalters und der Renaissance* (Studies on the History of German Theatre in the Medieval and Renais-

16 Bruno Latour, *An Inquiry into Modes of Existence*, trans. Cathy Porter (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2013), p. 13.
17 Ibid., p. 27.

sance Periods), in which the author put forth a modern methodology for the study of theatre history as a stand-alone discipline independent of literary studies. The great contribution made by the German scholar was not only his early 20th-century coinage of a concept of performance (*Aufführung*)[18] that is independent of drama, acknowledged as the correct and only subject of theatre studies, but also his practice of lending historical perspective to the study of theatre. Going hand in hand with this innovation was a departure from thinking of theatrical performances in terms suitable for a work of art—that is, as an object—in favor of acknowledging its irreducible materiality and corporeality, which essentially was to lead to an analysis of ephemeral cultural processes. Envisioned as a pillar of this new knowledge was the method of "reconstruction," that is, the reproduction of past "theatre achievements in all their particularity" (*Rekonstruktion theatralischer Einzelleistungen*).[19] This made it possible to treat theatre history as a history of events and thus to transplant the study of theatre spectacle from the realm of philology to that of cultural history.

"Theatre and drama [...] are originally oppositional [...;] the symptoms of this opposition consistently reveal themselves: drama is the textual creation of an individual, theatre is the achievement of the audience and its servants."[20] with these words Max Herrmann put forth a critique of the Hegelian

18 Herrmann's lectures on theatre history took place from the year 1900 at the German Studies Institute in Berlin. It is generally accepted that the first lectures on the subject of theatre were given by George Pierce Baker in 1895 at the United States' oldest university, Harvard, in Cambridge, Massachusetts. In Europe, theatre lectures were given by Eugene Lintilhac at the Sorbonne in Paris beginning in 1896. See Andrzej Wysiński, "Nauka o teatrze," *Pamiętnik Teatralny*, 2 (1971), p. 139. Erika Fischer-Lichte writes expansively about Herrmann as a founder of German theatre studies in her book *The Transformative Power of Performance: A New Aesthetics*, trans. Saskia Iris Jain (London: Routledge, 2008), pp. 29–37.

19 Max Herrmann, *Forschungen zur deutschen Theatergeschichte des Mittelalters und der Renaissance* (Berlin: Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, 1914), p. 5.

20 Max Herrmann, "Bühne und Drama," *Vossische Zeitung* no. 384, July 30 (1918). In Erika Fischer-Lichte, *The Transformative Power of Performance*, p. 30.

"poetic spirit" permeating acting—the theatrical *modus* of existence of drama—for the sake of the emancipation of the spectator, whose experience was to serve solely as evidence of theatre's existence. In a theatrical performance, the spectator finds himself in the "ruins of the tradition" (*Trümmer der Überlieferung*) from which the "long bygone event" can then be "resurrected" (*wieder erstehen*).[21] In this opposition, which was so fundamental to Herrmann's theories, what arose was less an aesthetic difference between theatre and drama than a social one: drama was an expression of a bygone form of individualism while theatre was a collective medium and an initiative whose actual creators became the audience. "Our objective is to breathe life into old stage performance and to enable [...] its ultimate reenactment in front of a contemporary audience without concerns about significant departures from the original,"[22] Herrmann stated in his 1914 work. He likewise emphasized that the source of theatricality dwells in the social instinct for entertainment and play, peculiar to a given collective (*der soziale Spieltrieb der Menge*),[23] and that the essence of theatre is to be a "social play" (*soziales Spiel*), which ought to be understood as a "play by everyone for everyone. A play in which everyone has a part."[24]

From such a perspective, the reconstruction of theatre meant presenting a theatrical event not as a structured chain of individual elements that can be ascribed particular meaning, but rather as a specific act of creating meaning, for which purpose there arise certain processes of exchange among all of the actors in the social game. In his understanding of theatre,

21 See Herrmann, *Forschungen zur deutschen Theatergeschichte*, p. 5.

22 Ibid., p. 13.

23 Ibid., p. 508.

24 Max Herrmann, "Über die Aufgaben eines theaterwissenschaftlichen Instituts," in *Theaterwissenschaftschaft im deutschsprachigen Raum. Texte zum Selbstverständnis*, ed. Helmar Klier (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1981), p. 19. See also Hans-Christian von Herrmann, *Das Archiv der Bühne. Eine Archäologie des Theaters und seiner Wissenschaft* (München: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2005), p. 246.

Herrmann thus drew closer to the concept of "cultural performance" elucidated in the 1950s by anthropologist Milton Singer. His notion of social performance concerned practices by means of which a given culture formulates its understanding of itself and its own image through actions that distinguish it from other cultures. Consequently, the act of granting the spectacle precedence over the text can be viewed as analogous to the developments arising from the modern-day study of rituals, in which the 19th century's unassailable hierarchy of myth and ritual is being inverted.[25]

The belief in theatrical performance's autonomy and the need to include it in the broad historical-cultural perspective was concurrently being formulated by theatre artists in search of a new language of expression. In his article "A New Direction in Theatre Studies," which appeared in the first issue of *Krytyka* in 1913, Leon Schiller expressed the need to establish a new field of study "concerned with studying purely theatrical phenomena," as a response to the emergence of a new form of theatre art understood as a "dynamic art form (expressing movement through movement—in time and in space)," a "sister art form to dance, agonistics, and other gymnastic arts," in which "not the word but the movement is the foundation of the stage presentation."[26] Schiller thus defined theatre art as something

25 Fundamental to this issue is Richard Schechner's seminal book on the study of performing arts: Richard Schechner, *Between Theatre and Anthropology* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985). See also Erika Fischer-Lichte, *The Transformative Power of Performance*, pp. 30–32. Fischer-Lichte asserts that the 1889 religious studies work by William Robertson Smith played a significant role in reducing the meaning of myth for the sake of "accessibly laying out the sense of ritual" and accepting ritual as a fundamental culture-forming practice, which influenced the theory of the era's ethnologists (James Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, 1890) as well as theatre scholars identifying a direct relation between ritual and theatre (Jane Ellen Harrison, *Themis: A Study of the Social Origin of Greek Religion*, 1912).

26 Leon Schiller, "Nowy kierunek badań teatrologicznych," in *Teatrologia w Polsce w latach 1918–1939*. Antologia, comp. and ed. Eleonora Udalska (Warsaw: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1979), pp. 25, 26.

of an "original" theatricality independent of literature but strongly attached to other arts as well as to religion, ethnology, "the cultural output of other nations," "folk psychology," and knowledge of the "human soul."[27]

Theatricality was perceived in even broader terms by the Russian director and theatre theoretician Nikolai Evreinov,[28] who treated it as a wholly anthropological category conducive to the study of a wide range of phenomena occurring throughout nature and social life, including animal behavior, corporal punishment, therapeutic experimentation, and rituals.[29] In his conceptualization of theatricality as a pre-aesthetic instinct, the Russian scholar formulated, to a certain extent, the groundwork for the field of theatre anthropology, understood above all as the study of "pre-expressive scenic behavior upon which different genres, styles, roles and personal or collective traditions are all based."[30] In his *Apology for Theatricality* (1908), writing about man's capacity to creatively transform reality as he perceives it, Evreinov put action itself at the center of consideration. Meanwhile, in *The Theatre in Life* (1915), where he described the theatrical instinct as "the instinct of opposing images received from without to images arbitrarily created from within, the instinct of transmuting appearances found in nature into something else, [...] the desire to be 'different',"[31] Evreinov acknowledged theatricality as a fundamental creative

27 Ibid., p. 25.

28 On Nikolai Evreinov's connections to Polish theatre, see Wiktoria and Rene Śliwowski, "Mikołaja Jewreinowa związki z Polską," *Pamiętnik Teatralny* 3–4 (1980), pp. 393–412.

29 See Swetlana Lukanitschewa, *Das Theatralitätskonzept von Nikolai Evreinov. Die Entdeckung der Kultur als Performance* (Francke Verlag, Tübingen, Basel, 2013).

30 Eugenio Barba, *The Paper Canoe: A Guide to Theater Anthropology* (Routledge London, 1995), p. 9. See also Eugenio Barba, Nicola Savarese, *A Dictionary of Theater Anthropology: The Secret Art of the Performer* (Routledge, London, [1991] 2011).

31 Nikolai Evreinov, *The Theatre in Life*, ed. and trans. Alexander I. Nazaroff (Martino Publishing Mansfield Center, CT, 2013), p. 22, 23.

and developmental principle in culture, religion, and politics; one that conditions our ability to exist, evolve, and change. Such theoretical reflection was also accompanied by practical reconstruction projects (now referred to as "practice as research"), specifically the in-depth study of historical performances and the methods of their production and acting. Evreinov's reproduction projects examined the ancient theatre, reconstructing the principles and plays of medieval theatre (1907–08); the theatre of the Spanish golden age (1911–12); the commedia dell'arte in an ultimately unrealized initiative; and perhaps his best-known mass spectacle, the reconstruction of the events of the October Revolution in *The Storming of the Winter Palace* on November 7, 1920—deeply ingrained this way of looking at theatre within cultural history. This new perspective was characterized by a belief in the potential of a performative reproduction of a past event—a repeat incarnation of the past that would offer a new perspective through bodily experience. This found a particularly clear outlet in Evreinov's intent to cast real-life participants of the storming of the Winter Palace and World War I casualties in his reconstruction of revolutionary events.[32]

My intent here is not to rework theatre history but rather to clearly place the beginnings of the modern discipline of theatre studies and its efforts to differentiate between drama and theatre, in a historical, cultural, and geopolitical context and to analyze the impact of these contexts on the development of the discipline. We must pose a fundamental question here: Was it pure chance that the outbreak of the Great War happened to coincide with the birth of European theatre studies? And to take it further: Can we identify any parallels between the emancipatory concerns taking hold in many areas of art, science, and social life and the pursuit of political expansion, freedom, and revolution? Is it pure coincidence that this new field of the

32 See Katarzyna Osińska, "Ewolucja widowisk masowych w Związku Radzieckim (od roku 1917 do lat 30.)," *Konteksty* 2 (2008), p. 167.

humanities was born and nurtured on the fringes of Western civilization, east of the Elbe—in Germany (mainly Prussia), Russia, and Poland? Can the rise of theatre studies as a stand-alone discipline ushering in the emancipation of the event from the text, and thus the story from its narrative, be acknowledged as a political statement by peripheral countries whose identity is much more strongly manifest in performative forms? Or is it the opposite: should we see it as attempt on the part of these nations to overcome their own otherness as countries that are "backward" and "behind the times" through an active involvement in the process of modernization taking place in the name of Western cultural values?

The emancipation of the event, which transpired at the threshold if the 20th century at the hands of theatre practitioners and theoreticians, was accompanied by the institutionalization of theatre studies as a new academic discipline. While theatre practitioners such as Schiller and Evreinov reconceived the experience of theatre as an experience of commonality and established the new conceptualization of theatre as participatory, the study of theatre morphed into an academically sanctioned objectification of that experience, directed by "a peculiar propensity for understanding time that passes as if it were really abolishing the past behind it."[33] Formulating the mission of the Institute of Theatre Studies in Berlin,[34] established in 1923 as the world's first institution of its kind, Max Herrmann emphasized that "the study of theatre is a living report from the past combined with the study of modern-day theatre."[35] What stands out in these words is the seeming desire to wipe out time, including the distinctions of "here and now" versus "there and

33 Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, p. 68.

34 The Institute of Theatre Studies was founded by Herrmann at the University of Berlin.

35 Herrmann, "Über die Aufgaben eines theaterwissenschaftlichen Institutes," in Helmar Klier (Hg.), *Theaterwissenschaft im deutschsprachigen Raum* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft 1981), p. 18.

then," and above all to legitimize the process of identification through scholarly sanctioning. That was the very moment when theatre studies abandoned time, and thus history, and when the fundamental paradox of the discipline was born: the persistent efforts to reconstruct a theatre event while at the same time professing its ephemerality. That inner conflict led to the formulation of the "myth of theatre*'s* ephemerality," a kind of scholarly illusion and intellectual superstition, a manifestation of the "modernizing front" described by Latour.

Based on this commitment to the ephemerality myth, theatre continues to function as a space for one-off and directly experienced live activity, as well as a site for events subject to a continuous process of disappearing. Proving fundamental to the reconstruction process was the matter of documentation and the collection of archival materials as essential, albeit inevitably flawed, tools that would enable access to a bygone event, and for that reason the new discipline found itself at the center of a complex mediation between history and the present. In the divide between an event and its material remains, in the negotiation of determining meaning between absence and presence, we can detect indications of the epistemological and the media breakthrough that transpired at the threshold of the 20th century.[36] Assuming this myth of theatre's ephemerality had taken hold, it's possible to comprehend theatre's response as its enthusiastic adoption of reproducible visual media such as photography, and especially film.

With this dual perspective—theatre as ephemeral/theatre as reproducible—alongside the theoretical concerns we must also consider the means and methods for documenting theatre coming to the fore and what producing a theatre archive meant in Polish culture in the new geopolitical situation following

36 See von Herrmann, *Das Archiv der Bühne. Eine Archäologie des Theaters und seiner Wissenschaft*, p. 15.

World War I when a modern state was being built.[37] The building of a new Polish state after 1918 was accompanied by the dynamic institutionalization of the nascent field of theatre studies, whose growth can be seen—much as in the case of modern art—via a different "practical functioning of the idea of nation, connected with the organization of the state [...] and not—as it was in the 19th century—with sentiments associated with memory, culture and language, all of which functioned outside of administrative structures."[38] On the one hand, the new field of study nurtured a belief in the autonomy of theatrical performances, but on the other, precisely for historical/political reasons, it strove to preserve the features of Polish culture that had been threatened with extinction for the duration of the 19th century.

37 In early reflections on methodology, the "essence of a stage work" was defined by its fleetingness in time and space. This definition was also accompanied by a postulate on the possibility to create a potentially complete documentation of the theatrical "here and now" that could protect it against ultimate disappearance. It is therefore no wonder that as early as 1925 to 1927, those involved in the Polish Stage Artists' Association attempted to build a center for the collection of theatre documentation at the Polish Institute for Theatre Studies, established for that very purpose and helmed by Wiktor Brumer. Also indicative of this move towards preservation were Władysław Zawistowski's (ultimately unrealized) plans to found a publication called *Almanach,* a periodical of a documentary nature. It was after all Zawistowski who, shortly after taking over the editorial duties at *Scena Polska*, said it was essential to launch an archive section in the magazine: "The necessity to archive all the facts and data concerning the going-on of theatre in Poland, done in the West and in Russia through periodically published theatre yearbooks, the likes of which are missing in Poland, obliges "Scena Polska" *to track all of the most significant facts and information and to present them in an accessible and organized form as archival material* for all future study of theatre history in Poland. The most fleeting and ephemeral of all the fine arts, theatre arts, on account of leaving practically no trace of itself and not being supported by rationally maintained theatre libraries or archives, fails to leave for future scholars even the most elementary data that would make it possible to approximately *reconstruct theatre performances for study*, even those in the recent past." In Wiktor Brumer, *Niedomagania polskiej teatrologii*, in *Teatrologia w Polsce w latach 1918–1939*, pp. 95–96.

38 Piotr Piotrowski, *Sztuka według polityki. Od "Melancholii" do "Pasji"* (Krakow: Universitas, 2007), p. 21.

Hence, from the beginning, the calls for the need to concentrate on the performance and not on the text were accompanied by a belief in the need to document live theatre in a logocentric archive. The process of archiving the (materially) unenduring performance as a maximally objective "survey" of the performance would involve transposing it into words, which would in turn become something of a meta-source for (text-based) reconstructions by theatre scholars. Moreover, that transformation into a textual record of the performance, allowing for reproductions on many levels (from realistic to theoretical), from the very beginning embraced not only documents, like the script, reviews, and the memoirs and accounts of contemporaries, but also the whole of the iconographic material (photos, set design plans, posters, video records), whose visual nature was reduced to—or "processed" into—an informational resource on the given play.

Thus the moment at which the study of theatre was institutionalized can be acknowledged as yet another move to repress everything of the theatrical event that was corporal and material theatre.[39] Julia Walker correctly asserts that the liberation of the performance from the text led, by virtue of negation, to the formation of the modernistic category of "the literary," which, relying on "anti-theatrical prejudice," proved to be a far stronger scholarly category than experience-based "performance." In effect, all that defined theatre—voice, posture, gesture, rhythm, movement, emotion—was acknowledged as a much weaker field

39 This paradox of emancipation and repression at the moment when theatre achieved autonomy from the text is well illustrated by Julia A. Walker in her article "Why Performance? Why Now? Textuality and the Rearticulation of Human Presence," *The Yale Journal of Criticism* 16, 1 (spring 2003), pp. 149–75. In a context extending beyond theatre studies, the American scholar recalls the text/performance split, bringing attention to the institutionalization of the split and its consequences. Analyzing the work of Max Herrmann while also referencing American orality scholars discussing the independence of oral English from English literature, Walker identifies a secondary repression suffered at the moment of theatre's emancipation by the term "performance" as something comprehensively connected to the body and corporality.

of scholarly study and thus was pushed out from the institutional circuit. The outcome was that bodily forms of communication, which may be treated as a particular kind of "theatre source,"[40] were either excluded from study outright or were transformed into lingual and textual forms. It must be added here that, in the process, theatre theory increasingly diverged further from theatre practice, especially when it came to dance theatre of the early 20th century, which itself formulated drastically different methods for documenting stage activity, the greatest example of which came to be the famous system of Rudolf Laban—Labanotation.

This predominantly logocentric basis for the study of theatre and spectacle achieved a particularly high level of clarity in European theatre studies in the 1970s and '80s, in the era when theatre semiotics dominated as the basic methodology in the analysis of theatrical presentations.[41] Semiotics once again repressed the corporality and materiality of the theatre event via the "performance description," which strove for maximum objectivity, and its peculiar fetishization of theatre signs, expressed out of a desire to decipher and interpret them in a manner similar to language signs. Likewise, the subject of theatre studies and theatre itself were conceptualized as phenomenological categories derived from the theories of Roman Ingarden.[42] As a result, theatre was acknowledged as an "event-

40 Theatre history based on the wholly distinct anthropological perspective of "theatre origins" is addressed by Mirosław Kocur. See Mirosław Kocur, *Źródła teatru* (Wrocław: Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, 2013).

41 See, among others, Tadeusz Kowzan, "Znak w teatrze," *Dialog* 3 (1969); Tadeusz Kowzan, "O autonomiczności sztuki widowiskowej," *Pamiętnik Teatralny* 1–2 (1970); Tadeusz Kowzan, *Znak i teatr* (Warsaw: Polskie Towarzystwo Semiotyczne, 1988); Grzegorz Sinko, *Opis przedstawienia teatralnego – problem semiotyczny* (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1982); Anne Ubersfeld, *Reading Theater*, trans. Frank Collins (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999); Erika Fischer-Lichte, *Semiotik des Theaters*, vols. 1–3 (Tübingen: Günther Narr Verlag, 1983).

42 This scholarly perspective was popularized in Poland mainly by Irena Sławińska, initially in the 1975 article "Inspiracja Ingardena w teatrologii współczesnej" in *Dialog* and later in subsequent versions in her books

like process" that does not exist as a "thing preserved in space," and thus was perceived as a phenomenon that is once and for all lost, unrepeatable, and unable to be verified empirically but only intellectually and with the aid of a verbal reconstruction that ostensibly enabled "its viewing."[43] Such a definition proved decisive in the departure from the study of ephemeral bodily actions as well as of the material remnants of the performance. From today's perspective, this vision seems like a testimony to theatre studies that, in striving to emancipate the discipline, ultimately situated the body on the side of disappearance instead of "rescuing" the text and image (also read like text!).[44]

Współczesna refleksja o teatrze (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1979) and *Teatr w myśli współczesnej. Ku antropologii teatru* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 1990).

43 Sławińska, "Ingardenowska teoria dzieła teatralnego," pp. 29–30.

44 It is precisely the textual and not material approach to reconstruction that exerted a decisive influence on the understanding of the documentation of theatre events, and by extension on the formulation of the idea behind the theatre archive, which apparently not coincidentally, reached its apogee in the 1970s. In one of the most relevant and iconic statements in this debate—*On the Matter of Documenting Theatrical Performances*—Stefania Skwarczyńska addresses the matter of defining the relationship between document and performance: "Their [documents] quality, number and authoritativeness—along with the skill with which the scholar can read the data of a performance from documents as seemingly trivial as, for instance, receipts for props—determines the degree to which the reconstruction can be made, as well as its scholarly value, measured, on the strength of historical knowledge of theatre, by the probability of its adequacy in relation to the performance in question." Stefania Skwarczyńska, "Sprawa dokumentacji widowiska teatralnego," in *Dialog* no. 7 (1973), p. 130. Identifying immense deficits in the materials documenting the history of theatre, Skwarczyńska thus called for a "planned campaign to gather documentation of theatre performances" for future generations, scrupulously listing—in addition to basic materials such as the play, set design plans, programs, posters, photos—dozens of document types that ought to accompany the production of any play: including film recordings of the play from two camera angles; close-up-rich rehearsal films capturing specific scenes for the purpose of reviewing the actors' performances; a film recording of the audience; a detailed script prepared by the assistant director; verbal accounts from spectators of various ages, education and social standing; notes on the spectators' first impressions; a log of all the modifications made during the production and its theatrical run; recordings of the all of the consecutive rehearsals; and a report on the discussions regarding the playbill, program, etc.

It also constitutes an apt starting point for contemporary criticism of archival thinking, which covers the sense and status of the source, the document, and the original and which may be acknowledged as a manifestation of the new deconstruction-inspired human anthropology. In the framework of that anthropology, it is precisely the fragment, the remnant, the detached remains that allow for a critical study of modernity by revealing modernity's ideological aspects and reconstructing the processes of social and psychological disintegration faced by individuals and communities.

The anachronistic conviction that "the material relics of a performance do not constitute in and of themselves the subject of theatre studies: a theatre work is thus not the sum of the material components but a conceptual structure that we reconstruct in the 'theorio-cognitive' process"[45] meant the elimination of all material traces of the performance. Hence, excluded from the reconstruction process were the matter of the actor's disappearing body and the peculiar archeology of the things that today—especially following new materialism—attain ever greater significance in reflections on the construction and reconstruction of historical facts. Ewa Domańska aptly also points out the need to foster an about-face in theatre studies "from a textual and constructivist approach to that which is material, concrete, present in the 'here and now' and as such accessible to direct observation."[46] She likewise emphasizes the validity of understanding matter as an "active, unpredictable form of constant presence endowed with a non-intentional agency," and proposes a peculiar "ontology of the relic."[47]

45 Sławińska, "Ingardenowska teoria dzieła teatralnego," p. 29.

46 Ewa Domańska, "Co to jest fakt historyczny (i dlaczego ponownie zadajemy to pytanie)?" in *Nowe historie 02: Wymowa faktów*, eds. Agata Adamiecka-Sitek, Dorota Buchwald (Warsaw: Instytut Teatralny im. Zbigniewa Raszewskiego, 2011), p. 17.

47 Ibid.

Interestingly, the repression of the body by way of its secondary discursivization in the study of theatre took place in the 1970s, during a period in which theatre vehemently rejected the idea of a performance based on a drama (literary text) in favor of pure action or visual presentation, challenging the boundary between art and life, art and reality, art and ritual, and, with the emergence of ever stronger intermedia relations, between the various disciplines of art, especially between theatre and film.[48] In this gesture of rescuing the ephemerality of the theatre event by a "professional spectator" it is possible to detect a peculiar repeat of both the emancipatory and the repressive processes of theatre studies' nascency. Also evident is a politically and ideologically equivocal reaction to the radicalism of performance art and the theatre of the 1960s and '70s. After all, the avant-garde of the period simultaneously strove to maximally demonstrate the impact of corporality, vocal materiality, and gesture, treating direct and unmediated presence as the only and unassailable value of the meeting of the event's actor/performer and the spectator/witness. On the other hand, for the very same reasons, it nurtured the myth of theatre/performance as the very synonym of disappearance and the antithesis of rescue. In this avant-garde counter-cultural movement, a considerable role was played by artists hailing from peripheral European countries, such a Marina Abramović from the former Yugoslavia, Hermann Nitsch and Otto Muehl from Austria, and Jerzy Grotowski, from

48 It's no wonder that the chief editor of *Dialog*, Konstanty Puzyna, first undertook considerations of the issue of documentation in the early 1970s with his original work titled *Próby zapisu* [Recording Attempts], which intended to devise a neutral description of performances without the traditional use of the script, based more on the action than on the text, which, naturally, is much more susceptible to disappearing. He writes more on this in collaboration with Tomasz Plata in the introduction to the second volume of the book *RE//MIX. Performans i dokumentacja*, eds. Tomasz Plata, Dorota Sajewska (Warsaw: Instytut Teatralny im. Zbigniewa Raszewskiego, Komuna Warszawa; Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej, 2014), pp. 120–22. See also our elaboration on the idea of "Recording Attempts," pp. 124–223.

Poland. Around the same time, a similar process of reinterpreting the meaning of the body in culture was taking place in African-language studies, in which research was being done on orature as a means of expressing African culture, and which left a fundamental influence of the anthropological approach on the theatre of the 1980s. Leszek Kolankiewicz, a leading researcher on Jerzy Grotowski, describes this intertwining of the concepts of the orature and performance in a fabulous way:

> The term "orature" was coined in the late 1960s by the Ugandan linguist Pio Zirimu of Makarere University in Kampala. He introduced the neologism in order to avoid the oxymoron arising from the use of the term "oral literature." [...]. Since Zirimu soon afterwards fell victim to the ruthless dictatorship of Idi Amin, he was unable to further expand on his concept. [...] In the 1980s, the concept was taken up by Pikita Ntuli, a South African sculptor, poet and storyteller, who attributed orature with the quality of a fluid blurring of the borders of conversation, storytelling, song, drama and performance. He even stated—which is worth repeating here—that "orature is something more than a synthesis of all arts. It is a concept and materialization of a holistic picture of life. It is a closed vessel of feeling, thinking, imagination, taste and hearing. It is the flow of the creative spirit." The term "orature" was later propagated by the Kenyan writer Ngugi wa Thiong'o, when, released from prison in his homeland, he traveled to the United States to give lectures at Yale University in New Haven, the University of California in Irvine (n.b. the same institution where Jerzy Grotowski had taught), and New York University, where he was also a professor of comparative studies and performance studies, i.e., a discipline pursued at the same institution by Richard Schechner, the author of the much-discussed *Performance Theory*."[49]

49 Leszek Kolankiewicz, "Posłowie do wydania polskiego," in Paul Radin, *Trickster. Studium mitologii Indian północnoamerykańskich*, trans. Anna Topaczewska (Warsaw: Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 2010), pp. 243–44.

Bringing their art closer to ritual practices, neo-avant-garde artists proved that cultural memory is not stored in archives but rather in the body—in oral tradition, in repeated gestures, in ritual reenactment and dance-induced trance. Voicing the belief that these kinds of activity are not practices of disappearance but expressions of cultural history, they simultaneously maintained—which is significant—a firm stance on those activities' visual preservation. They did this in a two-fold manner: either, like Abramović, subjecting their own activity to obsessive self-documentation with the aid of any technologies available and with political motivation ("I am from communist background—we document everything"[50]); or, like Grotowski, treating visual recording as material for their own explorations[51] and not as archival material for posterity, in doing so using direct bodily experience to oppose a culture based on the hegemony of vision and reliant on vision for understanding and cognition.

Body-Memory, Body-Archive

While reflecting on the concept of the body as a peculiar form of documentation and as a tool for practicing theatre history (and more broadly, cultural history), I would like to harken back to the sole theory elucidated in Polish performing arts focusing on the relationship between the actor/performer's body and memory. The theory in question is the anthropology of Jerzy Grotowski, whose foundational tenets—as was astutely demonstrated by

50 In Amelia Jones, "'The Artist is Present: Artistic Re-enactments and the Impossibility of Presence," *TDR* 55, 1 (2011), p. 38.

51 See for example "'To, co po mnie zostanie ...,' rozmawiał Jean-Pierre Thibaudat," trans. Leszek Demkowicz, in Jerzy Grotowski, *Teksty zebrane*, eds. Agata Adamiecka-Sitek, Mario Biagini, Dariusz Kosiński, Carla Pollastrelli, Thomas Richards, Igor Stokfiszewski (Warsaw: Instytut im. Jerzego Grotowskiego, Instytut Teatralny im. Zbigniewa Raszewskiego, Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej, 2013), p. 904.

Grzegorz Niziołek[52]—were formulated under the influence of experiences of the Holocaust, not fully articulated but ever present in the collective unconscious at that time. Particularly noteworthy here, I believe, is an oral statement given by the artist in 1969 during a meeting with a group of international students in Teatr Laboratorium and first published in 1979 in *Dialog* under the title "Ćwiczenia" (Exercises).[53] That text marks a certain boundary, being a synopsis of Grotowski's work on actor training inspired by the physical acting work of Konstantin Stanislavski and closing his performance phase while opening an exploratory period ultimately spawning his anthropological/philosophical concepts. Though Grotowski was initially concerned with stage practice, and with specific guidelines for the actor's everyday work on body control, his thinking in fact moved towards fundamental generalizations—notions like source, deed, fulfillment, and totality. And it is precisely this dual perspective—acting work and theoretical-cognitive activity—that gave rise to the body-memory concept in "Exercises":

> Body-memory. It is believed that the memory is something independent from all the rest [...] It is not that the body has memory. It *is* memory. It is what needs to be done to unblock the body-memory ... Or, perhaps, body-life? Because it surpasses memory. The body-life or body-memory dictated what needs to be done with life experiences or cycles of life experience. Or with possibilities?[54]

Certainly, with these words, Grotowski articulates a weighty reflection on the subject of the bodily dimension of memory, entirely transgressing, or actually flipping on its side, the horizon delineated by theatre scholars of the period. Nonetheless,

52 See Grzegorz Niziołek, "Teatr poza zasadą przyjemności," in Grzegorz Niziołek, *Polski teatr Zagłady* (Warsaw: Instytut Teatralny im. Zbigniewa Raszewskiego, Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej, 2013), pp. 281–308.

53 The text was based on stenographic report made during the meeting.

54 Grotowski, *Teksty zebrane*, p. 388.

as he stepped away from theatre, and with a gesture foreshadowing the future anthropologist in him, he ordained a privileged status for experience unmediated by documentation. In this perspective, corporality becomes self-sufficient and, in a sense, alienated from the subject by virtue of its existence; one's own body is never solely one's own body but the site where the collective body is manifested, where old rituals are rediscovered and ancestors found; it is a word, the space enabling the phenomenon of reminiscence and guaranteeing cultural continuity. The effect of a thus-construed idea of body-memory was the fact that Grotowski completely ignored the category of the archive. In this, we can identify an aversion on this part to all means of recording the direct presence of the artist/performer, as well as an implicit belief in the emancipatory nature of a memory, which is severed from social and political dependencies inherent in the oppressive institution of the archive.

Assuming such a perspective, it eventually becomes clear that Grotowski was not alone in his distrust of the archive, and not only as an artist but also as a theatre theorist. The same year, 1969, in his *L'archéologie du savoir* (*The Archeology of Knowledge*), Michel Foucault put forth a concept that would prove fundamental to postmodern criticism, in which the archive is seen as something that is not only the law "that governs the appearance of statements as unique events," but also something that exists "at the very root of the statement-event, and in that which embodies it, defines at the outset the system of its enunciability," while, as the "mode of occurrence of the statement-thing" becomes "the system of its functioning."[55] The archive was thus meant to disclose the rules of the practice that makes it possible for statements to persist and transform in a regular way. It is worthwhile, however, to note that in proposing his methodology for an alternate practice of history, Foucault also questions

55 Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith (Pantheon Books, New York, 1972), p. 129.

the notion of the document as a passive object on the basis of which the historical truth is recovered. Here he instead introduces the idea of the anti-document—a "monument,"[56] meaning a sensual foundation, living tissue, which ought to be studied in the same manner as an archeologist studies his sources. The document therefore ought not be treated as a sign of something else, of what is represented by it. Instead, we ought to accept its discontinuity and study the relationships inside the document itself, thus investigating the "formal analogies" and "translations of meaning."[57] For Foucault, the horizon of archeological study is a "tangle of interpositivities whose limits and points of intersection cannot be fixed in a single operation," with the goal of archeological comparison have "[not] a unifying, but a diversifying, effect."[58] It can thus be said that in the perspective offered up by Foucault, history becomes the processing and mobilization of documentary matter, which always depicts noncontinuous forms of persistence, not excluding the most alive tissue—the body.

Formulating his idea of body-memory concurrently with Foucault, Grotowski, much like his counterpart, sought living history in alternative means of reviving the past in the present. What radically differentiated him from the French philosopher, however, was his understanding of living tissue as a medium for memory, as he always saw a sign of something other in the body; something that alludes to spiritual, transcendental, and metaphysical dimensions that are inaccessible via direct

56 "Archaeology tries to define not the thoughts, representations, images, themes, preoccupations that are concealed or revealed in discourses; but those discourses themselves, those discourses as practices obeying certain rules. It does not treat discourse as document, as a sign of something else, as an element that ought to be transparent, but whose unfortunate opacity must often be pierced if one is to reach at last the depth of the essential in the place in which it is held in reserve; it is concerned with discourse in its own volume, as a monument," Ibid. p. 138–39.

57 Ibid., p. 163.

58 Ibid., p. 159–60.

cognition, dimensions that provide the framework where the body's materiality can attain its meaning. Though Grotowski relied on non-European concepts (Hindu and Sanskrit traditions, Haitian vodou and Ethiopian zar rituals) in his anthropological study of the possibilities for improving and opening up the body, it is hard not to notice in his body-memory notion a certain response to the concept of subjectivity built, in an era of decay, on the ruins of Western philosophy. No less striking is the omission of the historical dimension of the experience of ruin, through which the body and memory are subjected, in Grotowski's thinking, to abstraction and a peculiar form of universalization. To open up the body-memory likewise does not mean accepting the fragmentary nature of experience, the infirmity of the body, or the adaptation of its disintegration; on the contrary, it is the yearning for perfect functionality that is subordinated. This way, what takes shape is a vertical and patrilineal concept that became fully articulated in Grotowski's later writings/manifestos, such as *Tu es le fils de quelqu'un* (1986) and *Performer* (1988),[59] where the exploration of the body-memory was meant to make it possible to get to the bottom of the mystery of the beginning, to the moment of humankind's emergence, or rather of the emergence of "someone's son"—the "priest," the "warrior," the "hunter"—and thus to the origin, that is, to "some country, some place, some landscape" and to "the person who began singing the first words."[60]

My aim here is in no way to reconstruct the anthropology of Jerzy Grotowski but rather to extract the relevance that his ideas

59 Jerzy Grotowski, "Tu es le fils de quelqu'un; Performer," in *Teksty zebrane*, pp. 799–816. On the universalization of the male experience within the "performer" concept, see Agata Adamiecka-Sitek and Weronika Szczawińska in "Płeć performera," *Didaskalia* no. 100 (2010), pp. 56–62. This thinking was further elaborated by Agata Adamiecka Sitek in the feminist analysis *Apocalypsis com figuris*. See Agata Adamiecka-Sitek, "Grotowski, kobiety i homoseksualiści. Na marginesach 'człowieczego dramatu,'" *Didaskalia* no. 112 (2013).

60 Jerzy Grotowski, "Tu es le fils de quelqu'un", trans. Jacques Chwat, *TDR* 31, 3 (1987), p. 40.

of origins, direct experience, and communal primality—ideas arising from practice and formulated in writing—have had in the development of theatre historiosophy. What I am primarily referring to here is the influence of Grotowski's thinking on the dichotomy elucidated by Leszek Kolankiewicz on the basis of historical/cultural reflection concerning theatre studies, which arose from the enlightened notion of Western modernity, as opposed to theatre anthropology, which is rooted in local tradition. In his seminal work *Dziady: Theatre of the Feast of the Dead* (1999), Kolankiewicz undertook to rewrite Polish theatre history through the lens of cultural performances and to produce a grand narrative on deep-seated folk social structures, strongly linking Polish rituality with a peripherality of Polish culture that has been restored for the sake of studying theatre. Abandoning a purely philological examination of Adam Mickiewicz's masterwork, *Dziady* (Forefathers' Eve, 1822), he produced an unparalleled model for a cultural reconstruction of the origins of Polish modern theatre. Kolankiewicz read the Romantic drama as an ancient Slavic ritual commemorating dead ancestors, that is, as a pagan cult performed on the margins of Europe. He based his study on meticulous documentation and analysis resulting from innumerable "ethnographic expeditions" to libraries, while also demonstrating how to creatively place 20th-century theatre phenomena in the context of the study of historical phenomena. At the same time he sought to locate contemporary theatre on the theoretical horizon, which in the case of his book is defined above all by the structural anthropology of Claude Lévi-Strauss and the mythographic work of Karl Kerényi.

However, it is not only the methodological contribution of the father of "ethnography-infected"[61] theatre historiography and historiosophy that deserves our attention here. The political dimension of Kolankiewicz's work should not be over-

61 See Leszek Kolankiewicz, "Teatr zarażony etnologią," *Konteksty,* 3/4 (1991), pp. 13–22.

looked. After all, the examination of *Dziady* as the focus of a peripheral cult following, and the study of its nascency, evolution, and history, can all be found in *Dziady: Theatre of the Feast of the Dead.* Here Kolankiewicz locates the origins of theatre outside of the religious center, leading him to an explicit and essentially profane blow to Catholicism when he proposes the importance of another kind of faith—wild, pagan, and barbaric, in comparison with the Church's official teachings. Remaining implicit is the author's belief that Poland's theatre history has been influenced little by the enlightened model of learning, and that the country's cognitive horizon was restricted by Poland's dominant religion, which refuses to accommodate any spectacles other than those rooted in Christian tradition. To draw the new Polish theatre/historiographic paradigm out from pagan Romanticism seems like a clearly political gesture and at the same time means that Kolankiewicz's narrative also remains in the field of influence of the Romantic view of history. It is precisely the philosophy of Romanticism, grounded in the concept of mystic participation in the world as well as in the valorization of folk art and ancient customs, that allows the scholar to elevate folk culture to the rank of a myth of Polishness, and to reiterate the belief of Maria Janion as to the necessity of entering Europe "with our dead." The community of the living and the dead together is here a foundational rituality, and it is the ritual of the forefathers that allows the realization of "a collectivity that is strictly territorial but at the same time boundless and universal, extending to the nether world and to eternity."[62] In this way the anthropological interpretation of theatre and cultural history put forth by Kolankiewicz seems like a revival—by way of Grotowski—of the remains of history; a peculiar necroperformance of the last romantic drama theory

62 Leszek Kolankiewicz, *Dziady. Teatr święta zmarłych* [Dziady: Theatre of the Feast of the Dead] (Gdańsk:, słowo / obraz terytoria, 1999), p. 343.

in European literature,[63] formulated by Mickiewicz during his Paris lectures, which made it possible to inscribe the theatre history of a peripheral country into the process of Western European modernity.

It must be pointed out, however, that despite the political and profane gesture executed by Kolankiewicz, the structure of understanding the world and its interpretation in the mythical and mystical planes remains intact in this narrative—still ensconced in the vertical and universal order, which endows all events with the status of an element of a larger whole. This is especially apparent in the treatment of the body, which is here understood—again by way of Grotowski—as a medium between personal identity and the "I" that is discrete and "authentic," and which serves as the site of the spirit's revelation. This is a ritual body, which is always a tragic body; the site where myth is actualized, not history. Thus we are dealing here with a permanent world, one reborn in isolation from real political and historical experience, or with a concept of a mystic reality once again objectifying and universalizing that experience. If a crisis arises, it is relegated to the processual structure of the ritual, thus becoming a phase that is surmountable and not yet another moment signaling the changeability of history. In effect, what is potentially restored—locality, peripherality—becomes lost again through the removal of the body's experience from its specific social contexts and conditions.

In my reflections on the subject of the body as a document of cultural history—negotiating meaning between anthropological and theatreological thought while also considering the genealogies of the two fields—I wish to propose a scholarly perspective centered on the epistemological, media, as well as his-

63 This is how Włodzimierz Szturc described the idea of Slavic drama during his 1840–44 Paris lectures, especially in the famous Lecture XVI. See Włodzimierz Szturc, *Teoria dramatu romantycznego w Europie XIX wieku* (Bydgoszcz: Wydawnictwo Homini, 1999), p. 211.

torical and political dimensions of corporality. My intention is to attempt to delineate an alternative view of the connections between theatre and death, not from the point occupied by the (universal) subject proliferating the myth, performing the ritual, and creating the narrative; but rather from the perspective of subjects critically analyzing their own entanglements in these historically changeable categories. With this aim in mind, I propose the use of the "body-archive" concept, which, more than merely serving as an alternative to Jerzy Grotowski's idea of body-memory, emphasizes that notion's documentary and documentative nature, thereby becoming a unique meta-concept. Examining the body and corporality, my line of thinking strives to identify both the fragmentariness of memory and the discontinuity of history to uncover the absence of a source experience; to show, in a critical light, how the source is performatively staged and mediated; and finally, to reinstate the body's (or its documental remains') historical and political dimension.

Moreover, the linguistic aspect of the body-archive concept and its corpus aptly conveys the ambiguity of the boundary between matter that is both animate and inanimate, calling into question the fundamental distinction between action and its documentation, performance and visualization, history and memory. It also makes it possible to treat the various kinds of performance as "theoretical objects"[64] of sorts, whereby not only is history always tied to theory but also that which is particular becomes paradigmatic, and ideas find their justification in tangible matter and in practice. In this perspective, art and every form of social activity can become "a place for thought; a phenomenon in which thought is actualized in a way that is

64 Andrzej Leśniak applies this term—arising out of inspiration from the work of visual culture theoreticians like Luis Marin, Hubert Damisch, and in particular Mieke Bal—within the Polish context in reference to the study of images as phenomena that create history and theory. See Andrzej Leśniak, *Ikonofilia. Francuska semiologia pikturalna i obrazy* (Warsaw: Instytut Badań Literackich PAN, 2013).

irreducible to any other," and thus, "ought to be handled not only through theory but also as theory."[65] The criteria for the choice of such an object needs no justification, because the justification is, in fact, "contained in the object itself. Its theoretical value becomes apparent in its reading."[66] Following this line of thinking, it can be said that it is not so much in the cultural theatre event under study that the theory dwells but rather, as per the etymology itself, that theatre itself is theory,[67] which, using Grotowski's language, ought to be "unblocked." Nonetheless, in this way of looking at things the analysis of performative forms, whose essence is the lack of a distinguishable uniform external object, demands a significant correction. Acknowledging as fundamental to theatre the multisensory process taking place between the stage and the audience, of which remains—as Herrmann insists—nothing more than "the ruins of the tradition,"[68] it would be appropriate to speak not so much of "deciphering" the theory from the subject under study but rather of experiencing and actively reconstructing—that is, replaying—the complex and simultaneously fragmentary theoretical-cognitive process that is a theatre event. And likewise for all other forms of performance.

Cultural reconstruction of theatre therefore comprises above all the study of mediation processes, including the ways in which theatre becomes entwined in other art forms—in photography, painting, film, literature, dance and musical performance—which imbues those media with theatre's immanent tendency to stage situations, display corporality, and evoke the effects of immediacy, ultimately leading to a continuous oscillation between illusion and disillusion. An analysis of works of art in the context of political events, social facts, cultural

65 Ibid., p. 161.
66 Ibid., p. 205.
67 See Samuel Weber, *Theatricality as Medium* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2004).
68 Herrmann, *Forschungen zur deutschen Theatergeschichte*, p. 5.

norms, and media effects engenders a specific understanding of performativity, which I define as *theatricality in the media dimension*. Analyzing works of art in their media constitution makes it possible to discern theatricality in unrelated artistic practices, not so much on the basis of the idea that theatre is an art form based on the experience of immediacy but more so due to the philosophical understanding of theatre as a state of being *in between*, a state that defies all certainty or unifying theoretical consideration.

In his book *Theatricality as Medium*, Samuel Weber identifies in the worldview engendered by theatre practice an alternative to the totalistic Western tradition of philosophy, which promotes fixed identities and defines otherness as difference. Following Weber's line of thought, it is possible to identify in theatre's mediation between concealment and disclosure, truth and fiction—and in its constant shuttling between production and reception, between the simultaneous state of being here and being there—a fundamental vessel for heterogeneity in art and a tendency to shatter identity, elicit suspicion, and remind us of the relativity of the space we occupy as spectators. Such a view of theatricality poses a challenge to all aesthetic systems, making it possible to work out a transdisciplinary perspective for studying artistic as well as social and political phenomena.

With this in mind, I propose a term that is free of disciplinary and field limitations: necroperformance, which makes it possible to catch moments in which material remnants of history are mediated, transmitted, and transformed in culture. Necroperformance is a theoretical-analytical notion, thanks to which the dynamics, processuality, and reciprocality of the relationship between the observer and the observed are made visible, in addition to the opposition between the object and subject of study under scrutiny. Theory is actualized here through the implementation of historical materials, through the observer's resurrection in the here and now of consciously selected, revived, or unintentionally discovered historical remnants. The subject of

study is not a fixed point of reference or a passive object of historical reconstruction here, but an active body-archive, possessing its own historical matter, which appears and disappears and is thus subject to change.[69] Material remains that in a given moment of study reveal themselves to the observer as theoretical objects simultaneously spark an impulse to continue and intensify the cognitive process. In the view I propose, the mere undertaking and writing down of cultural history thus becomes a certain thought practice, providing an answer to the duality of the theoretical object by means of a symmetrical theoretical-cognitive process and not just with an attempt to objectify the subject of study. In the gesture of activating and recalling only certain (seemingly dead) aspects of history, which appear to be significant from the perspective of present and/or past time, the work of a cultural historian also reveals the speculative dimension of historical reconstruction.

In this book let us overcome or at least comparatively downplay the opposition appearing in theatre studies between the local and the global, and above all between the experiences of the center and those of the peripheries. The effect of such an approach is a duality emerging in the scholarly perspective presented herein. Of fundamental significance for this book's attempt to generate a cultural reconstruction of modern theatre was the work of Kolankiewicz and his struggle with the (Polish) peripheral form of modernity in *Dziady: Theatre of the Feast of the Dead*, as well as in the institutionalization of the anthropology of performance as an academic discipline. Nonetheless, in

69 In his *Pandora's Hope*, Bruno Latour argues that a necessary condition for a study subject to regain its historicity is the elimination of the subject-object and the activity-passivity dichotomy. If the subject of the study is only an immobile reference aim, it is deprived of the possibility to appear and disappear, and thus to undergo change: "Since they simply stand as the fixed target of correspondence, objects have no means of appearing and disappearing, that is, of varying." See Bruno Latour, *Pandora's Hope: Essays on the Reality of Science Studies* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 147.

reestablishing the relationship between the body/corporality, memory/remembering and the archive/archiving, the role of my guides was played by contemporary, and primarily US performance theoreticians: Peggy Phelan, José Esteban Muñoz, Rebecca Schneider, and Diana Taylor.[70] All of them, coming from a variety of standpoints—the study of the mortifying influence of imagery on action (Phelan), the non-normative presence and representation of the body (Muñoz), the transmission of experience from body to body in reenactments (Schneider), the relationship between the behavioral repertoire and the archive (Taylor)—ultimately arrived at similar diagnoses. They all underscore Western culture's marginalization of bodily practices arising from the tendency to attribute to the body and the event ephemeral traits that preclude all forms of recording, perpetuation, and preservation. This is how the body—as something that allegedly leaves no lasting traces—was excised from the archive, and as a consequence from the field of influence on historical narrative and identity politics.

Particularly relevant to my considerations here is the work of Rebecca Schneider, whose book *Performing Remains*[71] provides a deep analysis of the place of the body and event (including performance, spectacle, play) in Western archive culture. Schneider shows how the logic of the archive, based on the collection (as well as organization and classification) of the material remains of history, had to situate the functioning body within the space of absence—as a foreign body, constantly threatened

70 Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (London: Routledge, 1993); José Estheban Muñoz, "Ephemera as Evidence: Introductory Notes to Queer Acts," in *Women & Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory* 8, 2 (1996), pp. 5–16; Rebecca Schneider, *Performing Remains: Art and War in Times of Theatrical Reenactment* (London: Routledge, 2011); Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2003).

71 Schneider, *Performing Remains* (2011). See above all the chapter titled "In the Meantime: Performance Remains," which is a much-revised version of the paper "Archives: Performance Remains," *Performance Research* 6, 2 (2001), pp. 100–08.

by death, as something that in its perishability escapes the logic of the archive—in order to preserve the effectiveness of the performance archive. Above all, Schneider refers to Jacques Derrida, combining his critique of J.L. Austin's performatives in "Signature Event Context" (1972)[72] with his critique of archives in *Archive Fever* (1995), to designate the archive as a site where patrilineal laws are created and represented.[73] Nonetheless, Schneider makes a significant shift from Derrida's ideas. It is no longer language—with the connoted remains of the context from which it emerges—that takes center stage as a unique archive of history, but rather the body-event, which is subjected to repeated remediation. With this, Schneider proposes a radical reversal of scholarly perspectives, which allows an analysis of bodily practices as forms of recording, storing, and updating history; and also as capable of engendering reflection on those manifestations of culture in which culture reveals itself to be a space for "body-to-body transmission,"[74] and the body as a field of history that is incarnate and incarnated.

Schneider not only deconstructs the myth of the ephemerality of the body and performance in the spirit of Derridean critique of archival thinking; she also shows how, today, this patrilineal logic of the archive, constructed on the basis of the prerogatives of the Archon, can be subverted, overcome in order to make a queer interruption in historiography. In doing so, she puts at the very center of her reflections the notion of *reenactment*—a concept/activity that is appealing as a subject of study, both from a practical and a theoretical perspective, and which so wonderfully locates the point where the body and history (and historiography) intersect. This term applies above all to contemporary reconstruction practices in the art of the last

72 See Jacques Derrida, "Signature Event Context," in *Limited Inc.* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1977), pp. 1–23.

73 See Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

74 Schneider, "Archives: Performance Remains," p. 105.

decade, which are based on replaying the original, on repeating the performance, and thus are based on a mediatized embodiment of history and of its images (*Geschichtsbilder*). Owing to their meta-media character, these reconstruction practices constitute a unique form of theoretical-cognitive activity that examines the strategies and practices of memory as well as the status of the source, record, and document. Artistic reenactment practices, consciously juggling the cultural opposition of body and documentation, on the one hand reflect a conviction that living access to the past is possible by way of the body, while on the other they undermine the uniqueness and singularity of the event by carrying out the act of reproduction on the basis of existing (available) documentation. An analysis of artistic practices that reconstruct historical experience through the body compels us to ask questions regarding where the "original" and "authentic" version of the event is preserved. Is it in the visual documentation remaining after the event? Or, perhaps, the accounts of the spectators? Or is it in the body of the actor/performer, which possesses the power for repeated actualization of the bygone event—whether directly present or subjected to subsequent mediation?

In order to invoke a critical approach to the logocentric nature of archives, and to identify the possibility of transmitting the past in the present via the medium of the body, Schneider gives considerable attention to traditional historical reconstructions. In her consideration of historical reenactments we find Schneider's fullest expression of the criticism of archival thinking, or rather of the illusion that it is only through written or visual remains that we can gain access to history. It is no wonder then that, in proposing a new philosophy on history and performance Schneider begins her book in a rather defiant fashion, marking out the terrain of ethnographic study in the foreword:

> I went to Civil War. I did not go to an archive, though that would have been the most legitimate path to set for myself as a scholar interested in history. Instead, I went to witness battles mounted in the *again* of time out of joint, as a scholar interested in history's theatrical returns.[75]

In this way Schneider returns in her book to the origin of the reenactment. It is precisely the historical reconstruction, generally viewed as a naïve cultural practice and, from the perspective of the logocentric logic of archives, a "ludicrous copy of something only vaguely imagined,"[76] that the author treats as a corporal way of practicing history, one that undermines the traditional opposition between the documentation of an event and its ephemerality. In themselves historical reconstructions always constitute a repeated event that leaves behind "residues" precipitating "in the network of body-to-body-transmission of affect and enactment."[77] From this perspective the bodies of the reconstruction's participants in themselves become a form of ruins, or rather—in a performative repetition—living historical remains. Identifying in the bodily transmission a form of "counter-memory,"[78] Schneider not only acknowledges the events as a kind of documentation but also argues that the mere gesture of archiving may be treated as an event that is governed by the laws of ephemerality. All forms of documentation, including seemingly permanent ones like textual, photographic, and film documentation, can break free of the "source" context, of the restrictive "archontic *house arrest*,"[79] and acquire a sovereign strength capable of completely blurring the semantic line between them and the original.

In her book, Schneider steers clear of the tenets of European theatre studies—her interests revolve around the political inter-

75 Schneider, *Performing Remains*, p. 1.
76 Ibid., p. 101.
77 Ibid., p. 100.
78 Ibid., p. 101.
79 Ibid., p. 104.

dependencies between the foundations of American identity and contemporary returns of wars and terror, or around issues that casually link European theatre tradition (Jerzy Grotowski) with American performing arts heritage (the Wooster Group) and the legacy of the classic avant-garde (Gertrude Stein), pop-culture, and performance art icons (Andy Warhol, Marina Abramović), as well as with the work of a more recent generation of visual artists (Tino Seghal). Yet Schneider's inquiry can convincingly be applied—and in the still-present duality of aesthetics and history—not only to the contemporary theatre studies but also to the very birth of the discipline, which allows for a fundamental revision of the history of theatre studies. Theatre studies' myth of the unrepeatability and irreproducibility of a theatre event is thus undermined at its very roots—via the aforementioned study and actions of Nikolai Evreinov: his elementary study of historical performances, which he carried out in the form of reenactment practices. More than anything it was through his spectacular reconstruction of a political event, *The Storming of the Winter Palace*, whose documentation history[80] in and of itself constitutes an autonomous set of materials for the study of the relationship between the body and the archive, that the theatre became a model for the repeated actualization of revolutionary events.

My proposition, therefore, entails not only an attempt to conduct a critical analysis of the relationship of the body and the archive in the context of theatre but also tries to include reconstruction practices in the study of theatre, its history, and, ultimately, in the history of the discipline. In the proposed theatreological-historiographic perspective, reconstruction does not have to mean exclusively a somewhat crippled "additional scholarly procedure" to which "a theatre historian

80 The matter is reconstructed in detail by Sylvia Sasse in *Nikolai Evreinov. "The Storming of the Winter Palace,"* eds. Inke Arns, Igor Chubarov, Sylvia Sasse (Zurich: diaphanes, 2017), pp. 7–20 and 269–79.

is condemned," "deprived—in the face of the ephemerality of theatre productions—of direct contact with the subject of its analysis."[81] On the contrary, the aim is to conduct theatre studies in which the "hard" theatreological notion of reconstruction is grasped as an arduous process to find in the deficient source materials and documentation the "traces of the performance" and to identify the theoretical-cognitive process in reconstruction practices based on repetition and remediation. In doing so, it may become possible to present a story in which the archive reveals itself to be a place for the performance of knowledge and in which the body constitutes a full-fledged archive offering living access to history and politics, including the history and politics of theatre and theatre studies.

Arising at the threshold of the 20th century, reenactment practices—understood as efforts to reveal the body as an autonomous medium of the past—make it possible to uncover the conservative dimension of the institutionalized study of theatre taking shape at the time. In the act of defining the essence of a work of theatre by its unrepeatability, and thus creating the myth of theatre's ephemerality, we see a political gesture that entails an attempt to distance, to create a gap between, an action and its documentation, between the present and the past, and, ultimately, between art and politics. Guaranteeing the autonomous status of a stage play, not only in relation to the text and literature but also to social realities, and redirecting scholars' attention to an immanent analysis of the performance, theatre studies constitute one of the many tools of the knowledge-power structure serving to counteract the recurrence of radical political acts and to repress the memory thereof. Arising as a means of preserving these acts were "naïve," popular plays put on by progressive theatre artists for the purpose of carrying out performative repetitions of revolutionary acts.

81 Skwarczyńska, "Sprawa dokumentacji widowiska teatralnego," p. 130.

It must be thus underscored that reconstruction practices in theatre (and subsequently in film, performance art, and visual art) have roots in the practice of reenacting important political events as a peculiar form of cultural archive. Such practice can be traced back to the French Revolution, which Daniel Gerould describes as "the first great European upheaval that its creators immediately perceived as a spectacle to be enacted and reenacted."[82] Proving this point are the numerous historical reconstructions appearing as early as on the first anniversary of the fall of the Bastille, both in public performances (for example, *La Prise de la Bastille* at Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris) and professional theatre, the main aim of which was to demonstrate the role of the masses in shaping history.[83] Mass reperformances of revolutionary events can also be seen as "dynamic rituals" that made it possible to transform society after the revolution through physical acts and through the collective "enacting of the abstractions of liberté, egalité, and fraternité."[84] Duplicating that very gesture of repetition a century later, Evreinov took on the role of someone who—in spite of the thesis on the singularity of a performance—carried out a repeat embodiment of a revolution. Keeping in mind that the October Revolution was already in the minds of its participants a repetition of the 1789 revolution (and the plays depicting it), Evreinov revived in the theatre the premise of historical materialism, which Karl Marx put forth in 1852 in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*. It was here that Marx, analyzing the history of France as a country where "more than anywhere else, the historical class struggles were each time fought out to a

82 Daniel Gerould, "Historical Simulation and Popular Entertainment: The Potemkin Mutiny from Reconstructed Newsreel to Black Sea Stunt Men," *TDR* 33, 2 (1989), p. 162.
83 Ibid., p. 163.
84 See also Kimberly Jannarone, "Choreographing Freedom: Mass Performance in the Festivals of the French Revolution," *TDR* 61, 2 (2017), p. 119.

decision,"[85] pointed out the need to study repetitions in history as a fundamental aspect in his method of study. The studies and actions of Evreinov proved revolutionary on two levels simultaneously, the meta-political and the meta-media, becoming a sort of practical-theoretical knowledge both on the subject of politics (its basic principles and final aims) and on theatre as a strictly self-referential medium. Situated in this kind of political-media and at the same time practical-theoretical perspective is also the work of the Polish theatre artist and philosopher from the early 20th century, Stanisław Wyspiański.

Living Leftovers of History

Stanisław Wyspiański, the Polish theatre artist, interior and graphic designer, poet, painter, and architect, wrote to his friend and fellow playwright Lucjan Rydel on May 2, 1897: "Pawlikowski promised to stage *Warszawianka* (Varsovian Anthem, 1898) next season, in October, and release it along with Maeterlinck's *Intérieur* [*Interior*, 1894], for All Saint's Day."[86] It is easy to imagine that the idea of juxtaposing a political drama about the death of a young insurgent with Maeterlinck's existential play about the death of a young girl—as a funeral celebrating the modern "theatre of death" and the death of conventional realism—would excite Wyspiański. He was thrilled not only at the prospect of his long-awaited theatrical debut—especially alongside the acclaimed Belgian poet—but more importantly with the underlying concept for showing both pieces together: highlighting, during a single performance, the relationship between a gesture and an image. This is a crucial relationship

85 Friedrich Engels, "Preface to the third German edition," in Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (New York: International Publishers, 1852), p. 13.

86 Maria Barbara Stykowa, *Teatralna recepcja Maeterlincka w okresie Młodej Polski* (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1980), p. 43.

for Wyspiański and Maeterlinck in these texts, as well as for theatre criticism and performance theory. Tadeusz Pawlikowski finally realized his plan to stage the two plays in 1901 in Lviv, albeit under circumstances that altered the intended impact. The entire event was framed as a display of patriotism,[87] emphasizing the background of the November Insurrection, a failed Polish rebellion against Russia in 1831. But the project as it was originally conceived survived in the history of theatre thanks to its reconstruction by Jerzy Grzegorzewski. While staging *Interior* and *Varsovian Anthem* in 1976 at the Stefan Jaracz Theatre in Łódź, the director above all drew attention to the relationship between gesture and image, expressed through the division of the stage space into two parts by means of a massive window supported by two white columns—in the classicist style of 19th-century architecture. By placing the action of *Interior* behind the window and by having *Varsovian Anthem* play out in the foreground, directly in front of the audience, it would seem that Grzegorzewski based his show on the accurate observation that the plays represent complementary commentaries on the theatrical situation.

Interior reveals a boundary placed between the stage and the audience, by means of two characters (the Old Man and the Alien). They possess knowledge of and comment on events that take place beyond the stage as well as on the characters (a Mother, a Father, two Girls, a Child) pantomimed onstage in the enclosed space of the house and observed through the window by the two characters along with the audience. In Maeterlinck's drama, image is not exclusively coextensive with the visible, since there are images existing in the form of words. As a result, a certain regime of images emerges, which, as Rancière would say, "presents the relationship between the sayable and the visible, a relationship which plays on both the analogy

87 Maria Barbara Stykowa writes on the subject in greater detail: ibid., pp. 59–60.

and the dissemblance between them,"[88] and due to which the stage becomes a place where a play between the dissemblance of two identities—of word and image—is made manifest. The constant interplay of the two replaces dramatic action, or more precisely leads to a fundamental transformation of the essence of drama—towards stasis. As a result, the category of time becomes problematized, and even more significantly the relationship between dramatic time and stage time is presented in reverse order: while typically audiences encounter the time of the drama's action in condensed form (for example, many years in Shakespeare's history plays are reduced to several hours onstage), in *Interior* an extremely short dramatic time (one can already see the approaching party, which is about to inform the oblivious family locked inside the house of the daughter's death) is mercilessly stretched out and, in a sense, spatialized. Both history and space are drawn apart; as Jean-Luc Nancy put it, one witnesses the "spacing of time, of time, that is, as a body."[89] The spectator, as a witness to the play's action as it is suspended over time, becomes that body in Maeterlinck's *Interior*. However, the witness is not understood as a passive onlooker but as an active subject, an "emancipated spectator" who transgresses the division between witnessing and the action through the realization of her own position as a participant in the power structure expressed in "the distribution of the sensible."[90]

One encounters a static drama in Wyspiański's *Varsovian Anthem* as well; the play encapsulates its action in a seemingly nondramatic image. However, the relationship between image and action works a little differently than in Maeterlinck's work.

88 Jacques Rancière, "The Future of the Image," in Rancière, *The Future of the Image*, trans. G. Elliott (London: Verso, 2009), p. 7.

89 Jean-Luc Nancy, *Corpus*, trans. R. A. Rand (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), p. 41.

90 See Jacques Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator,* trans. G. Elliott (London: Verso, 2009), p. 42.

Here the order of the images is based on a confrontation between the twenty-one static figures onstage, immobilized in poses inside a mansion and directly observed by the viewer, and the dynamics of a battlefield, no more than evoked through atmosphere, gesture, and music—while the battle itself takes place outside the frame of the stage. The static image of the twenty-one characters is not, as in the case of *Interior*, subordinated to the narrative of characters who see and know, but is torn apart by the sudden intrusion of the realities of war, expressed onstage in the mute scene with the Old Man. Based solely on physical action—the Old Man enters, salutes, hands over a package with a bloody ribbon, salutes again, and leaves—the scene tears apart the aesthetic dimension of the image, revealing its fundamentally political aspect: in the safe space of the mansion (within the frame of the image) are the generals of the uprising, while on the actual battlefield, outside of the frame and facing immediate danger, the regular, nameless soldiers fight. Although the Old Man is an embodied character, and the entire scene is in fact a rhythmically (and musically) organized score without the support of the spoken word, he is primarily a discursive sign of an insurgent, marking the boundary between the brutality of the war (against the oppressor) and the safety of the mansion (homeland, home)—and at the same time mediating between history and myth. This is how Wyspiański creates, in *Varsovian Anthem*, a model "image of history"—a *Geschichtsbild*. The term denotes a flexible construct that transgresses the opposition between looking and acting, and which does not need to conserve a particular version of memory or interpretation of history but within which—due to the particular relationship between perception, interaction, and different media—an image reveals its own mode of being and its role in constructing memory and history.[91] The sense of this image has been

91 See Jacques Rancière, *Figures of History*, trans. Julie Rose (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2014).

brilliantly analyzed by Jan Nowakowski, who called *Varsovian Anthem* a "synthetic vision of a real historical moment, and the staging of the content of that moment, such as its character, atmosphere, and crucial internal tensions."[92]

In my opinion the meta-media and meta-historical potential of the image discovered in this early drama became a foundation of Wyspiański's stage practice, which was based on the reenactment of "images of history." By making the theatre into a place and a tool for researching the strategies of historical imagery—the ways of viewing the past, transmitting history, and staging memory—the works of Wyspiański are a kind of historiosophy in practice. His works often employ strategies of reenactment that reveal relationships between action and image and a uniquely understood dynamic of the theatre: as always already being a site of repetition and furthermore as a machine of memory and of remembering. Maybe that is why the Ghost from Wyspiański's *Hamlet* (1904), a hybrid text integrating narrative and dramatic forms, disappears uttering the words that—repeated with a punctuation so characteristic of the Polish poet—become a meta-commentary, bringing out, and much more emphatically than in Shakespeare'e original, not so much the question of individual memory as that of memory in general: "Adieu, adieu, adieu! – Remember me! – – – / Remember – about me! / (*disappears*)." From this perspective, disappearance comes to determine not only the process of remembering but also of all appearing, thus becoming for Wyspiański not just a loss of origin permeated by nostalgia but the most solid foundation of theatre.

As a particular philosophical treatise on emergence and disappearance can be treated the second act of the play *Wyzwolenie* (Liberation, 1903) which is based on an agonic game—the essence of drama—taking place between the main charac-

92 Jan Nowakowski, "Wstęp," in Stanisław Wyspiański, *Warszawianka; Lelewel; Noc listopadowa* (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1967), p. liv.

ter, Konrad, and the embodied Others, the Masks. It is here that the appearance of each consecutive Mask is conditional upon the disappearance of the previous one, and only this dynamic allows for grasping the *continuum* of time not as a natural course of history but as a performance staged by Wyspiański that problematizes the linearity of duration:

> Ledwo, że larwa gdzieś przepadła, / Barely has one maggot disappeared,
> inna się już na scenę wkradła […] / when already a new one onstage must be revealed […]
> Zaledwie maska ta gdzieś znika, / Barely has that mask disappeared,
> już nowa za nim się pomyka. […] / when a new one follows him with great speed. […]
> Zaledwie ta ze sceny schodzi, / The old one has barely left the stage,
> już nowa drogę mu zagrodzi. […] / when already a new one crosses his way […]
> Precz znikła; nowa już się skrada, / Gone to hell; a new one sneaks around,
> już za nim tropi, śledzi, bada. […] / follows him, tracks him, peeks […]
> Znika, a nowa już powstanie, / Disappears, and a new one takes its place,
> by nowe zadać mu pytanie: […] / to spew demands in his face: […]
> Już nowa, – ledwo tamta pada – / A new mask – the last one has barely hit the ground –
> znów nieodstępna od Konrada. […] / again can't be reached through Konrad's mind […]
> Znikła; już inna jest i bada / It disappears; yet a different one is there
> niepokojącą myśl Konrada. / to examin Konrad's thought so frail.[93]

In this act with the Masks, Wyspiański seems to be performing a reversal of the traditional historiographical logic that recognizes past events as belonging exclusively to the past; and at the same time a reversal of the traditionally understood archive

93 Stanisław Wyspiański, *Wyzwolenie* [Liberation] (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1970), pp. 64–160.

that identifies the disappearance of matter/body. The Mask, through the dynamic of its appearance and disappearance, transform the ephemeral into an act of remaining, of gathering thoughts as traces, as remnants of an encounter, while revealing itself as a particular medium of communication, which is based on the already interactive bodily memory. That memory has to be "read through genealogies of impact and ricochet."[94] Konrad, as a complex intertextual character, constitutes a kind of bodily archive of the history of Polish drama and theatre (or more broadly, of Polish culture). The Masks, on the other hand, as a foreign surface knit with one's own face ("Masks in this act will mark / those who hide their thoughts in the dark / and never state them clear, / hence, while theirs, they claim many heirs"[95]) perfectly illustrate the relationship between human and object, between animate and inanimate matter. Due to this relationship in each subsequent collision between Konrad and a new Mask, it is not so much a presence as a past encounter that appears, understood in terms of a "resonance of the overlooked, lost, muted, clearly unacknowledged."[96] From this perspective the body in Wyspiański's theatre becomes a medium that saves those aspects of the event that escape traditional forms of recording and preserving history, and documents what is marginal and marginalized in culture. However, the bodily archival practices are not aimed at complementing the traditional archive in order to create a "full documentation," but on the contrary they highlight the incompleteness and fragmentariness of memory as well as the relativity of historical narratives based on memory.

It is worth highlighting that what Wyspiański practiced in his theatre work, deeply immersed as he was in historical-cultural reflection, constituted a subversive application of premodern

94 Schneider, *Performing Remains*, p. 102.
95 Wyspiański, *Wyzwolenie*, p. 62.
96 Ibid.

strategies of manifesting national awareness based on "ethnolinguistic, cultural premises substituting for an independent country."[97] It is known that one of these strategies—*tableaux vivants*—fascinated and inspired him since his early childhood. This incredibly popular form of 19th-century entertainment, taking place on a massive scale in private homes, entertainment venues, and even outdoors, entailed the reconstruction of a painting, literary work, or sculpture by both amateur and professional actors who would replicate a scene captured in a particular work of art by means of scenography, costume, and above all pose, that is, by facial expression and the appropriate disposition of the body. These spectacles—in which living pictures were first arranged and then animated onstage—were "treated as if they were almost documentaries."[98] As a form of didactic art, their revolutionary potential was later discovered by Bertolt Brecht; they can also be seen as a prototype of contemporary historical reenactments, conserving the image of the nation and its past. Barbara Markiewicz stresses the fact that within the technique of tableaux vivants and its history, it is possible to "recognize the emergence of a fundamental institution of modern democracy—the public sphere,"[99] which makes it imperative for any research on the essence and function of tableaux vivants to also include, apart from aesthetic considerations, reflections from the field of political theory. "Political philosophy mustn't only describe political systems, institutions or structures of power. It also has to take into account the ways in which they are understood. That is to say, it should

97 Piotrowski, *Sztuka według polityki. Od "Melancholii" do "Pasji"*, p. 13. Piotr Piotrowski interprets the painting by Jacek Malczewski titled *Melancholia* as a classical example of the manifestation of national awareness at the end of the century.

98 Małgorzata Komza, *Żywe obrazy. Między sceną, obrazem i książką* (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, 1995), p. 292.

99 Barbara Markiewicz, *Żywe obrazy. O kształtowaniu pojęć poprzez ich przedstawienie* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo IFiS PAN, 1994), p. 11.

consider they ways they are presented, particularly the images associated with them."[100] It is beyond any doubt that tableaux vivants, based on assumptions shared by a given community, reveal their potential to translate existing, socially sanctioned connections between images and concepts into desired political relationships, and hence to remodel socially established ways of thinking. From this perspective, what becomes crucial is the reconstruction of specific (living) pictures, with reference to distinct political concepts, in order to reveal the ongoing changes in the meaning of those concepts and images under specific political-historical conditions.

Tableaux vivants can thus be seen as a special kind of metamedia performance addressing the relations between the animate and the inanimate. They constituted a theatrical form whose essence lay not in action but in stillness; they were live reproductions—organic copies—of specific works of art and not of the reality being portrayed in the given work. Though tableaux vivants, being always a reenactment of something that has already been reproduced from reality, fundamentally represent the notion of repetition, they also give the viewer a sense of participating in a fleeting and singular event, as attested to by the fact that people were always trying to preserve them, first through descriptions and drawings capturing the static action as faithfully as possible, and later through the use of photography.[101] Also problematic was the matter of the original work of art itself, as most often the painted scenes were reenacted on the basis of copies of the original works of art, stand-alone reproductions serving as illustrations in magazines or books, or of photos from albums or even postcards for mass distribution.[102]

Wyspiański was interested in tableaux vivants as a cultural phenomenon for which the society freely restaged carefully

100 Ibid., p. 16.
101 See Komza, *Żywe obrazy*, p. 332.
102 See ibid., p. 354.

selected images from Polish history (as they were interpreted in works by Mickiewicz, Sienkiewicz, Grottger, or Matejko). These stagings allowed for the survival and preservation of Polish culture outside of the state's official circulation, at a time when Polish culture was under the constant threat of annihilation. At the same time Wyspiański saw tableaux vivants as a cross-media artistic practice that focused the spectator's attention on the relationship between the stage and painting, between action and its disruption, a performing body and an immobilized one. Wyspiański based *Varsovian Anthem* on the model of tableaux vivants; he attempted to probe the endurance of the spectators' participation in a suspended dramatic action, thus analyzing time (duration, history) itself and arguing that its structure is not linear but always that of actualization through repetition. Already in that early drama the past appears as the present in the form of material residue, a remnant of history.[103] In the scene interrupted by the Old Man, it is symbolized by a bloody ribbon, thanks to which the crowd of immobilized characters onstage is infiltrated by the dynamic battle that takes place in the distance. However, it was in his later works—particularly in *Liberation* and *Akropolis* (Acropolis, 1904)—where tableaux vivants acquired the status of what Hubert Damisch calls "a theoretical object,"[104] and underwent critical and historiosophical reflection in which images of the past first had to undergo deconstruction and only then could be reconstructed. This twofold move in the epistemic process allowed Wyspiański to show images of history as interpreting the culturally dominant paradigm of politically instrumentalizing historical events in the name of a particular politics of memory.

103 See Rebecca Schneider, "As past and yet present in varied remains," in *Performing Remains*, p. 37.

104 Yve-Alain Bois, Denis Hollier, Rosalind Krauss, "A conversation with Hubert Damisch," *October* 85 (1998), pp. 3–17.

Liberation occupies a special place among Wyspiański's works in the context of the relationship between memory and disappearance, history and the present, image and action, as well as between staging and performing. It was in this particular work that Wyspiański employed a reconstruction of "images of history" (including the history of theatre) as a kind of epistemic action in the most extensive way. *Liberation*, which takes place on the stage of the Krakow Theatre, where it premiered on February 28, 1903, is based on the concept of metatheatre. The main protagonist, Konrad, also the hero from Adam Mickiewicz's Romantic drama *Dziady*, comes up onto the stage to liberate contemporary Poland from the burden of tradition: from theatrical conventions as well as from political and social inertia. In the first act Konrad tries to write a new play in a collective process onstage, but his efforts fail because of the commercial habits of the actors. The second act, which takes place behind the stage, portrays the philosophical and political confrontation between Konrad and the Masks. In the third act Konrad comes back onstage to continue the failed attempt to create a "new art of life." Here he has to confront not only actors who are not interested in experimental theatre but also the Polish Ghosts from Wawel Cathedral, preserving the "tradition of death" in conventional art and status quo politics. Wyspiański uses the metatheatrical structure to accomplish a number of goals: to deconstruct the 19th-century theatre of illusion, to show the process of theatrical production, to explore various acting styles and acts of perception, and to analyze the theatricality of politics and the influence of cultural heritage on any resistance to change. Thus the meaning of "theatre" is broadly extended—encompassing the complexity of the theatre as a multimedia art form as well as social practices, cultural forms of memory, political gestures, and rituals.

Even though formally it resembles a three-act drama, the text itself has very little in common with conventional dramatic literature. As a text that was written for the stage (and so is

always already repeated) it underwent numerous transformations due to the ways in which it was produced and received. Furthermore, the various book editions constituted—as Leon Schiller stated—"the most complete scripts for those who know how to read them."[105] What is most important, however, is that the genealogy of the text of *Liberation* is connected to theatre, not to literature, to particular stagings that have become important events in the life of society—such as the world premiere and reception of *The Wedding,* by Wyspiański, which took place on March 16, 1901, and *Dziady,* by Mickiewicz, adapted and directed by Wyspiański on October 31, 1901. After all, *Liberation* begins with a scene referring to the theatrical event of *Dziady*, which had taken place a year earlier and was still alive in the minds of the spectators. It is not Konrad as a literary (and mythical) construct who enters the stage but the actor Andrzej Mielewski, who also played Konrad in the very *Dziady* Wyspiański had rewritten and staged, and was playing both Konrads in repertory. That fact of theatrical repetition was crucial for contemporary spectators, who, while reacting with reservation to Wyspiański's new work, were enthusiastic about the "performer playing the part of Konrad from *Dziady*," being able to "transform into Konrad from *Liberation* during the second night.[106]

It was the memory of spectators of the (recent past) event that Wyspiański cared for the most. The entire structure of the play attempts to convince us of that fact by resting on the interplay between what has been seen and overlooked, remembered and forgotten, and what has been recalled, repeated, and recreated. *Liberation* is composed of a spectacle (interrupted by the second act) entitled "Contemporary Poland" which, being

105 Leon Schiller, "Wyspiański w literaturach zachodnioeuropejskich," in Leon Schiller, *Na progu nowego teatru* (Warsaw: PIW, 1978).
106 Stanisław Dąbrowski, "Sceniczne dzieje Wyzwolenia," in *Wyspiański i teatr: 1907–1957* (Krakow: Państwowy Teatr im. Juliusza Słowackiego, 1957), p. 107.

a reenactment of the theatre of politics, presents Polish society as divided against itself, stuck in permanent conflict between classes and ideologies and lacking any constructive political program. However, the spectacle-within-the-play is framed by backstage situations showing the specific process of its establishment, recollection, and perhaps reanimation. For the first minutes of the play one witnesses something like a rehearsal of the spectacle, together with the demonstration of the mechanisms and means required for its creation, or rather, its recreation on a stage of very specific dimensions: "twenty steps in width and length / Quite an extensive space, / in which to enclose Polish thought."[107] With this clash of acting and reenacting we are able to fully understand the words of Robespierre on the essence of political reconstruction as a "spectacle of spectators."[108] "Contemporary Poland" is based on the repetition of already existing cultural (and theatrical) patterns, words, situations, objects, and characters—a kind of archive of social behaviors internalized and forever revisited in the bodies of the audience members. There is a reason why Konrad-Mielewski states right at the beginning: "This soil I loved / with rage / burned by desire I consumed this earthly stage! — / I'm in every man, I live in every heart"[109] (these words are a travesty of Konrad's words from "The Great Improvisation," the most significant and finest monolog in *Dziady*: "Now, I'm soul-bound with my motherland; / With my body I swallowed its soul").

But before Konrad is able to undertake the challenge of restaging the national spectacle, or more precisely, even before he is to appear on the stage, the spectators have to confront the theatre technicians, called Workers, resting after their work on

107 Wyspiański, *Wyzwolenie*, p. 11.
108 See Daniel Gerould, "Historical Simulation and Popular Entertainment: The 'Potemkin' Mutiny from Reconstructed Newsreel to Black Sea Stunt Men," *TDR: The Drama Review* 33, 2 (1989), p. 163.
109 Wyspiański, *Wyzwolenie*, p. 5.

the still empty stage. Wyspiański's play begins with a reflection on their status, work, and material conditions:

> Wielka scena otworem, / Expansive stage wide open,
> przestrzeń wokół ogromna; / With vast spaces around it;
> jeszcze gazu i ramp nie świecono. / Gas and ramps have not yet been lit.
> Kto ci ludzie pod ścianą? / Who are the men by the wall?
> Cóż tu czynić im dano? / What are they here for?
> Czy to rzesza biedaków bezdomna? / Is it a band of homeless souls?
> Głowy wsparli strudzone, / Resting their tired heads,
> cóż ich twarze zmarszczone? / Why are there frowns on their faces
> Przecież pracę ich dzienną płacono. / When their wages have been paid?[110]

These men of labor—always present and indispensable yet invisible—are first presented in a theatrical "ground zero," outside of any kind of "as if"; only after the appearance of—or rather after they are confronted by—Konrad's thought and work do they become actors who play Polish workers hailing from peasantry. The scene of the Workers resting that opens *Liberation*, one based on a radical reduction of theatricality and on a juxtaposition of acting and non-acting, reveals an understanding of the theatre that is highly characteristic of Stanisław Wyspiański: an understanding where, one is tempted to say, theatre is defined—as in Jerzy Grotowski's concept—as "poor," and the actor as "deprived." That very understanding of theatre as an expression of absolute honesty determines, I believe, the development of the play: the mass of workers ("The force is you") who, Konrad will demand, must do the right thing—throw off the shackles and spill blood offstage ("Sit on the sidelines and in the corners until I summon you to action")—would perform an authentic act of self-revelation in order to change history. That is why "Contemporary Poland"—based on highly

110 Ibid., p. 11.

conventional, theatrical gestures—takes place after the Workers have left. They will later come back onstage as a Chorus, but only after Konrad reveals the "as-if-reality" of the theatre; and they will remain with him after he has been left "alone on a vast and empty stage." Despite the lack of physical presence of Workers during the spectacle of "Contemporary Poland," the alienation of work at a theatre—marked at the very beginning by means of their bodies—comes to determine the intransigent conflict between the director and actors on the one hand, who perform roles based on "pretending," and Konrad on the other hand, who believes that acting is about revolutionary action and forsaking the "as if." It is this very fact that makes "Contemporary Poland," understood as a "reconstruction of images of history," a means of showing the meta-theatrical and meta-political dimension of theatre, in which actors not only play actors but "are actors being actors working"[111] and reveal themselves as such to the audience of *Liberation*.

Reading *Liberation* from the perspective of reconstructive practices aims to show that, for Wyspiański, debunking the myth of the ephemerality of the theatre did not mean—as it did for the Romantics and the heirs to the Romantic tradition, such as Jerzy Grotowski—reconceiving theatre as ritual. Instead we were to lead theatre back to politics. That is why, in *Liberation*, Wyspiański contrasts the "actor-as-courtesan" not with the "actor-as-saint"[112] but with the enactor of the revolution. This take on Wyspiański's work allows us to see him as an entirely modern artist of the theatre and as a philosopher of modernity, conscious of the deep connection between the myth of the uniqueness of a theatrical performance and the economic-production processes as well as matters related to technical reproduction. When it comes to establishing the relationship between economy and culture, it is not history that turns out

111 Compare Schneider, *Performing Remains*, p. 114.
112 Jerzy Grotowski, "Aktor ogołocony," in Grotowski, *Teksty zebrane*, p. 256.

to be the key, since the question is not—as Walter Benjamin claimed—about the economic origins of culture, but about presenting the "expression of the economy in its culture."[113] So one could claim that the theatrical reconstruction created by Wyspiański in 1902—which revealed the economic process as an "evident pre-phenomenon" of the subsequent signs of (stage) life—brought to light the conclusions that Benjamin summed up in his most famous 1936 essay, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction":

> [F]or the first time in world history, mechanical reproduction emancipates the work of art from its parasitical dependence on ritual. To an ever-greater degree the work of art reproduced becomes the work of art designed for reproducibility. [...] But the instant the criterion of authenticity ceases to be applicable to artistic production, the total function of art is reversed. Instead of being based on ritual, it begins to be based on another practice—politics.[114]

This conviction is most fully expressed by the character of the Old Actor, who keenly confronts the ephemerality of theatre with the permanence of revolution and importance of politics:

> Mój synu—*mówi matka*— ho, to twój ojciec z bronią / My son—says the mother—it's your father with a rifle
> walczył za świętość naszą i zdobył się na czyn ... / he fought for our virtues and took action ...
> (Legł w sześćdziesiątym trzecim; dziś zapomniany grób). / (He fell in '63; today his tomb forgotten).
> nikt wieńców mu nie dawał, nie rzucił kwiatu, świec ... / no one brought him wreaths, flowers, or a candle...

113 Walter Benjamin, "N [On the Theory of Knowledge, Theory of Progress]," in Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. H. Eiland, K. McLaughlin (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002), p. 460.
114 Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken Books 2007), p. 224.

> Mój ojciec był bohater, a ja to jestem nic. / My father was a hero, and I am merely nothing.[115]

The ephemerality of the theatre resonates in a particular way in this context, something radically different from the "hard" theatrological interpretations that highlight the essential fleetingness of a theatrical event in time and space. However, in Wyspiański's work ephemerality does not signify ontological fragility or the nostalgic transience of theatre (an event). On the contrary, it bespeaks the mediocre and illusory character of a socially established image based on the logic of consumption, only appearing to be able to guarantee lasting recognition:

> Sława artystów! Nie dziwne mi wieńce. / Glory of artists! Wreaths are no surprise.
> Miałem ich pełne dwie, o te dwie pełne ręce, / I had these two hands full of them,
> gdy mój święciłem dzień trzydziestu lat na scenie. / when I celebrated my thirtieth year onstage.
> Oklaski miałem ich, uznanie i znaczenie. / I had their applause, recognition, and respect.
> Efemeryczne to, przez jeden wieczór lamp, / It's ephemeral, for one night in the light of lamps,
> a gaśnie, gdy pogasną skręcone rzędy ramp. / and goes dark, along with rows of ramps.[116]

Like Benjamin, by allowing history to decay into images and not stories in his works, Wyspiański showed that historical truth emerges from the collision between our reality and the past events that reveal themselves in the light of an image that

115 Wyspiański, *Wyzwolenie*, p. 197.
116 Ibid.

flashes here and now.[117] Within the historiosophy practiced in the theatre, Stanisław Wyspiański awakened a yet unrealized knowledge of the past. He "dissolved," as Benjamin would say, "mythology into the space of history," and tried to find a "constellation of awakening"[118] based not on progress but on the actualization of the revolutionary body. Benjamin argued that "the first stage in this undertaking" would be for a historian to adapt the principle of montage or "to assemble large-scale constructions out of the smallest and most precisely cut components."[119] The goal would be to break with historical naturalism and instead grasp the structure of history through a montage of its debris: "But the rags, the refuse—these I will not inventory but allow, in the only way possible, to come into their own; by making use of them."[120] What is more, this gesture of montage should never be hidden or masked. On the contrary—following the example of the critical, epic theatre of Bertolt Brecht—it should expresses itself through a series of interruptions in the structure, which consists of discontinued gestures.[121]

A congenial example of historiography understood in this manner can be found in Wyspiański's *Acropolis*, which is both a reconstruction and a montage of remnants of history. This dramatic poem, well known through a legendary adaptation by Jerzy Grotowski and Józef Szajna (1962), who transplant the action to the reality of a concentration camp, is originally set at Wawel Cathedral in Krakow. For centuries the cathedral has

117 See remarks on the subject of the dialectic image in, for example: Adam Lipszyc, *Sprawiedliwość na końcu języka. Czytanie Waltera Benjamina* (Krakow: Wydawnictwo Universitas, 2012), p. 515.
118 Benjamin, *The Arcades Project,* p. 458.
119 Ibid., p. 461.
120 Ibid., p. 460.
121 See Georges Didi-Huberman, *The Eye of History: When Images Take Position*, trans. S. B. Lillis (Cambridge, London: MIT Press, 2018). See also remarks by Grzegorz Niziołek in Niziołek, *Polski teatr Zagłady* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej, 2013), p. 421.

played a crucial role in political life as a Polish "Altar of the Fatherland"—a ritual space for the coronations of Polish kings, as well as a most significant necropolis, housing the tombs of monarchs and national heroes. Wyspiański's drama was created as a theatrical response to an initiative to thoroughly renovate Wawel between 1895 and 1910. While the renovation was still in the preparatory stage, Wyspiański set out to scrupulously document all the old architectural details, intending his sketches to serve as a reference for the work of future renovators.[122] At the same time, when Wawel was being reconstructed, he closely followed the public debate on the cathedral as the "Polish Acropolis," as well as deliberations on the social, symbolic, and utilitarian value of specific elements in the cathedral. Employing his ability to see what is overlooked and marginalized, Wyspiański made the works of art that had been expelled from the archive of memory and history during the national reconstruction into the protagonists of *Acropolis.* The play is centered on the reanimation of statues, tapestries, frescos, and paintings that have been forgotten in the long history of the cathedral or considered unnecessary during the renovation. Ewa Miodońska-Brookes reminds us of the truly political method of reclaiming history's leftovers: "All of the works of art that were criticized in the press, but also those that were discarded, moved, or destroyed during the restoration process have become the blueprints for Wyspiański's characters in *Acropolis*."[123] Removed from the

122 See Maria Prussak, "Pieśń Wawelu," in Maria Prussak, *Wyspiański w labiryncie teatru* (Warsaw: Instytut Badań Literackich PAN, 2005), p. 101.

123 Ewa Miodońska-Brookes, "Introduction," in Stanisław Wyspiański, *Akropolis*, (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1985), p. xvii. Among the rejected works were "allegorical characters from the monument of Sołtyk, who had been transformed into Clio, Lady, and Time in act 1 of *Acropolis*; a female character from the moved and destroyed monument of Skotnicki, condemned for being stylized as ancient characters from the tombstone of Ankwicz (Maiden and Cupid); or the monument of Włodzimierz Potocki (removed from its original location, it spent three years packaged before it was set up in Queen Zofia's Chapel in the cathedral); characters from the Trojan and Jacobean Tapestries

archive of Polish culture, the sculptures are granted a second life, or even a second power doubled in Wyspiański's drama: personally connected to the art and architecture of Wawel, the playwright[124] not only retrieves their material presence by introducing them onstage; he also animates them, giving them the power to act, with vitality and physical strength. As a result, Wawel, which for a long time had been merely—as Leszek Kolankiewicz rightfully observes—a "dead cult object, a souvenir, and a document," reveals its "secret, dramatic structure."[125] Hence *Acropolis* becomes a philosophy of theatre recorded as the drama of reconstruction, based on an examination of the boundary between life and death, organic and nonorganic matter, man and object, and finally between an event and the process of its documentation. In conclusion, Wyspiański suggests the possibility of a complete detachment of the copy from the original, as well as of discovering—in repetition—a life that is sovereign and autonomous vis-à-vis the original event.

Maybe this is the reason why it was only the 2004 reenactment of Jerzy Grotowski and Józef Szajna's 1962 staging of *Acropolis* by the Wooster Group that was able to illustrate the concept of body-as-archive—which in my opinion is fundamental to Wyspiański's theatre. The Wooster Group's reconstruction was executed not through a physical-spiritual reminiscence of its sources—the method demanded by Grotowski in his concept of body-memory—but instead via the naively mimetic recreation of gestures on the basis of a set of available audio-visual materials.[126] In this way, the New York artists managed to reach

donated to the diocese museum; and finally the much-critiqued monument of David from which the Harpist was born."

124 Maria Prussak recalls the influence of Wawel Cathedral on the majority of Wyspiański's works—"from the legend of his debut to an unfinished *Zygmunt August*, written on his death bed." Maria Prussak, *Pieśń Wawelu*, p. 100.

125 Leszek Kolankiewicz, "Kłącze *Akropolis*," in *Dialog* 1 (2015), p. 124.

126 These materials included TV recordings of MacTaggart from 1968, rehearsals of the play, as well as a secretly shot conversation with Stefa Gardecka, former secretary of the Laboratorium Theatre.

Wyspiański's understanding of history as a montage created from pieces of its debris. In his article entitled "Kłącze *Akropolis*," Leszek Kolankiewicz observed this phenomenon:

> [When] actors from The Wooster Group get together to imitate actors from Laboratorium Theatre, who performed in *Acropolis*—and they imitate with great mastery—their copy contains only what was caught by the camera: if there were only heads and arms, they would repeat that very composition and movement of the limbs and heads, while sitting down, because the imitation didn't involve legs, since the image didn't preserve it.[127]

Wyspiański was convinced that the character of the relationship between humans and objects is physical and active, and also that objects possess an autonomous power to preserve memory. To him, the "here and now" of theatre was not in danger of disappearing, since he understood the present as the material record of the past. As a painter, however, he knew perfectly well that there was a fundamental relationship between matter and perception and that—as Henri Bergson would say—things act within us, because we are part of what we perceive: "My body is, then, in the aggregate of the material world, an image which acts like other images, receiving and giving back movement."[128] And furthermore: "The objects which surround my body reflect its possible action upon them."[129] From this particular perspective, reconstruction turns out to be not only an exercise in recollection but, more importantly, a reaction to instructions delivered to us by other bodies and objects.[130]

127 Kolankiewicz, "Kłącze *Akropolis,*" p. 122.
128 Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, trans. N. M. Paul and W. S. Palmer (New York: Zone Books, 1991), p. 19.
129 Ibid., p. 21.
130 See Bjønar Olsen, *In Defense of Things: Archeology and the Ontology of Objects* (Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2010), pp. 181–83.

By employing the perspective of reconstruction in researching the theatrical work of Stanisław Wyspiański, one is able to see him as a seminal figure not only for modern theatre but also for contemporary theatrical historiography—the latter based on a complex relationship between body and image, an event and its documentation. This perspective also forces one to review the history of 19th-century Polish theatre, and to break the pattern of framing it as based solely on drama (traditional, logocentric approaches), or as yet another spectacle providing a manifestation of Polish culture. Wyspiański, viewed from the perspective of reconstruction practices, is not a performer, restorer, or potential deconstructor of the paradigmatic Polish national theatre as it was created by the Romantic writers. Or at least he is not only that. He turns out to be more of a reconstructor of 19th-century images of history that informed the paradigm of Polish culture into the 20th century. He might well be the creator of the "anthropology of reconstruction," a modern branch of the humanities that emerged out of the rubble of the Great War,[131] which employs the concepts of *fragment*, *remnant*, *remains*, and *mediation* as the only possible perspectives from which to experience reality and history.

It is not surprising that it was only on the occasion of the 1916 stage production of *Liberation* that an art critic noticed that the author of the play was, in fact, a "historiosopher, who

131 The thesis concerning the connection between the experience of war and the birth of the philosophy of fragments was presented by Marta Leśniakowska in her paper "The Experience of War, Anthropology of Reconstruction," presented at the conference *First World War – Its influence on art and humanities. Summary on its centenary*, which took place on October 14, 2014 at the Institute of Arts at the Polish Academy of Sciences (PAN) in Warsaw. The author used a concept of the anthropology of reconstruction in her paper mainly in the context of a prosthetic body, discussed on the basis of visual materials, primarily photography and film. My proposed research perspective, which I call the "anthropology of reconstruction"—has been developed independently on the basis of theoretical-theatrical reflection.

expresses himself through poetry."[132] The context of the war also led to a different opinion on the importance of Wyspiański's various works; *Liberation,* always considered only as a "minor" play, was reconsidered as the key work among his writings:

> *Liberation* is one of the most intriguing plays for anyone wanting to learn about Wyspiański's national ideology. [...] The drama seems to be placed behind a kind of a glass wall where one can see it, but never touch it with our nerves and sensibilities. While in *The Wedding* we have living people for protagonists, people who kept the Polish suffering, shame, desperation, and hopelessness inside of them, in *Liberation* we are presented with the nonbiological categories of poetry, politics, apathy, or willingness to act as protagonists in human form [...].[133]

These are the words of Adam Grzymała-Siedlecki from an article published on April 27, 1916, in *Kurier Poznański*, in which he reported with great perceptivity on the latest news from Teatr Polski (at the time based in German-occupied Warsaw), right next to the letters of the Polish soldiers fighting on the front lines while serving in the Prussian army.

132 Adam Grzymała-Siedlecki, "'Wyzwolenie' na scenie warszawskiej," in *Kurier Poznański*, April 27, 1916, supplement.
133 Ibid.

An Archive of the Great War

The Soldier's Experience

> The great war lives on here inside my head, with its hellish images exploding in a volcano of colors and stink and noise. I can still see the scorched turf there giving birth to them: All the great catastrophes of the century—they were all born of that one tragedy: the 1914–1918 war.[1]

This jarring statement by a French infantry soldier who survived World War I, from which his country emerged victorious, opens Jean-Francois Delassus's documentary film 14–18: The Noise and the Fury (2008). The film's narrator, a *poilu* private[2] (foot soldier) becomes something of a star witness of the events, guaranteeing the authenticity and credibility of the facts, and more importantly depicting the Great War as formative in the creation of a European identity. This identity was in no small part rooted in a new and peculiar culture of war based on the acceptance and assimilation of violence, a turning point that was paradigmatic for subsequent world catastrophes in the 20th century.[3]

1 Cited from the English-language version of Jean-Francois Delassus's 2008 film 14–18: The Noise and the Fury.

2 *Poilu* is a term for simple soldiers of the French infantry, most of whom came from the countryside. Initially used as a slur, over time the term shed its pejorative overtone. As argued by Modris Eksteins, "Words like *poilu* or *Frontschwein*, the hairy one and the front pig, referring to the dirty, mud-caked, bearded French soldier and his German counterpart, became terms of affection in their respective countries by 1916, not the terms of abuse they might have been in an earlier age of colorful and heroic military engagements." Modris Eksteins, *Rites of Spring: The Great War and the Birth of the Modern Age* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1989), p. 146.

3 On this subject, Delassus's film owes much to the French historian specializing in the study of World War I, Annette Becker. Her book *14–18. Retrouver la guerre* (Paris: Gallimard, 2000), written jointly with Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau, became the chief inspiration for the film's director.

Delassus's film very clearly shows this aspect of the war, as well as the assimilation of violence and lawlessness and the affirmative attitude of Europeans to the nascent conflagration—evidenced by the masses of earnest volunteers joining the ranks of national armies in the name of patriotism. The protagonist of The Noise and the Fury describes the vicious paradox: "We wanted that war. In 1914, that was our *raison d'état*."

The key word in this story of an ordinary soldier in the Great War is "experience"—it is through this prism that the global events are examined and subsequently reported. According to Frank Ankersmit, "the highest stage of historical consciousness" lies in the "moods, feelings and the experience of the past,"[4] and the chief purpose of historiography lies in sensitizing us to the mysteries of the past and not in "surrendering to intellectual fashions from which the reality of the past, its hopes, its catastrophes, its joys and miseries, has so completely been banned."[5] In Delassus's film, experience is collectivized, turning the "I" into "we": "I want to show you the horror that we came to suffer." The position of the witness/participant intensifies the emotional impact of what is seemingly objective: the appalling images of war, together with all the data and statistics. Even when the film's narrator provides the numbers—"10 million dead. 23 million wounded. Half of all of the 70 million conscripted into the armies. That is the naked truth about this war"—the information is more impactful than mere numbers. The abstract dimension of this "truth" becomes concrete as the viewer relates the data to the bodies of the rank-and-file soldiers, subjected to the wartime paroxysms of violence. Thus the choice of how to tell the story becomes paramount in the film.

4 Frank Ankersmit, "Gadamer and historical experience," in Frank Ankersmit, *Sublime Historical Experience* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2005), p. 231.
5 Ibid., p. 232.

This narrative approach, however, is applied in an exceptionally subversive manner. Delassus treats the experiences of the past as a starting point for creating dramatized reenactments of real-life persons and historical events based on a revaluation of archival remains of the past. Produced on the ninetieth anniversary of the end of the First World War, THE NOISE AND THE FURY is an attractive montage of visual material from military, medical, and film archives. It includes photographs, documentary and propaganda films, military hospital records, wartime and interwar-era feature films, as well as imagery from the second half of the 20th century and recent film and television productions.[6]

In cooperation with archivists and historians, Delassus performed a variety of reconstructive procedures on documents from the time of the Great War, like remastering audio, coloring images, editing together materials originating from different periods and of differing media, and even generating new materials, reconstructing missing items and documents based on information gathered from existing textual records. The resources and documents are treated as materials with their own dynamics that serve the structure and creation of a story about war. On the one hand, the sense of a documentary evidence arises here as a result of producing credibility via a first-person narration provided by an entirely fictional protagonist reporting from the battlefield; while on the other, the documentary impact of the film consists in generating a sense of authenticity by placing that fictional character inside documents left behind by history ("This is my only surviving photo. It was taken

6 Among them are: THE BATTLE OF THE SOMME, dir. Geoffrey Malins and John McDowell, 1916; HEARTS OF THE WORLD, dir. D. W. Griffith, 1918; SHOULDER ARMS, dir. Charlie Chaplin, 1918; THE BIG PARADE, dir. King Vidor, 1925; WHAT PRICE GLORY, dir. Raoul Walsh, 1926; VERDUN, VISIONS OF HISTORY, dir. Léon Poirier, 1928; ALL QUIET ON THE WESTERN FRONT, dir. Lewis Milestone, 1930; MANY WARS AGO, dir. Francesco Rosi, 1970; LE PANTALON, dir. Yves Boisset, 1997; and LES FRAGMENTS D'ANTONIN, dir. Gabriel Le Bomin, 2006.

in Artois, on the eve of that dreadful night. I am fourth from the left in the third row"[7]). Thanks to this double-edged strategy, the director effectively creates an illusion of experience and at the same time undermines that which we call the truth of the archive.

In Delassus's film, the French *poilu* functions above all as a vessel for a media depiction of the Great War as it was preserved in letters, accounts, journals, and memoirs. The most famous story to document the experiences of life in the trenches is *Under Fire,* by Henri Barbusse. This account, subtitled *The Story of a Squad*,[8] was serially published starting in August 1916 in the Parisian newspaper *L'Œuvre* and was released in book form by the Flammarion publishing house in November of that year. Barbusse's story was by no means the first fictionalized account of a soldier's life on the front lines—literature from the front began to develop rapidly just months into the war,[9] quickly finding backing from numerous publishers, particularly in Germany and France, who even initiated special series devoted exclusively to war literature.[10]

Barbusse's *Under Fire*, however, constitutes a considerable departure from the norm. Though the French writer constructed his narrative as an "authentic" account of a witness/participant, which clearly satisfied the demand of publishers and readers alike, he remained unaffected by the thirst for

7 Cited from 14–18: The Noise and the Fury.

8 Henri Barbusse, *Under Fire: The Story of a Squad*, trans. Fitzwater Wray, (London: JM Dent and Sons, 1988).

9 Nicolas Beaupré, *Écrire en guerre, écrire la guerre. France, Allemagne, 1914–1920* (Paris: CNRS Éditions, 2006). In August 1914 alone, 1.5 million front poems were written in Germany.

10 For example, the German publishing house F. Fischer published the series *Schriften zur Zeitgeschichte*; the French publishing house Hachette published the series *Memoires et Récits de Guerre*, and Berger-Lavrault released *La Collection France*, *La Biblioteque de la Guerre,* and *Les Récits des Temoins*. See Nicolas Beaupré, "Frontliteratur des Ersten Weltkrieges. Das Entstehen eines neuen literarischen Phänomens im Kontext des Ersten Weltkrieges," www.zeitpfeil.org/static/common/download.php/save/.../Frontliteratur.pdf, pp. 2–3.

representations of war as an incredible experience and a fascinating, often exotic adventure.[11] In the epic montage of scenes unveiling the dehumanizing aspect of the machine of war that left proletariat soldiers living in a near-vegetative state—ordinary men who, in the name of the nation, were forced to fight in defense of foreign (capitalist, imperialist) interests—Barbusse, a future member of the Communist Party of France, takes a clearly political stance on the war. The documentary nature of the book—the clear reference to the bygone war in the story told from the perspective of a participant—and, in contrast, the poetic language of visions based on mediated images of the Great War, create a peculiar meta-narrative on the ways in which soldiers' experiences are represented; a kind of reflection on the war machine that, at the turn of the 1930s, would gain critical force in literature, as well as in art, theatre, film, and philosophy. It was this period that spawned the most vocal anti-war stories by veterans of World War I, many popularized by film adaptations: *The Case of Sergeant Grischa* (1928), by Arnold Zweig, *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1929), by Erich Maria Remarque, *Four Infantrymen on the Western Front* (1929), by Ernst Johannsen, and *Good-bye to All That* (1929), by Robert Graves, to name a few.

Without a doubt, personal documentation literature—written in every European country during the war and on a mass scale afterwards[12]—painted a picture of World War I that most

11 See the remarks of Nicolas Beaupré in *Écrire en guerre, écrire la guerre*, p. 4.

12 The technique of presenting global events through a prism of the experience of "ordinary people," so characteristic of the Western European historical discourse on World War I, was also used in Poland in several noteworthy publications. In 2014 Włodzimierz Borodziej and Maciej Górny published an excellent work recalling the events on the Eastern Front via the letters and recollections of war participants in that part of Europe: *Nasza wojna. Europa Środkowo-Wschodnia 1912–1916. Vol. 1 Imperia* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo W.A.B., 2014). On the one-hundredth anniversary of the outbreak of World War I, the Head Administration of the National Archives began publishing journals, memoirs, and correspondence in the series *Wielka Wojna—codzienność niecodzienności*, compiled and edited by Jerzy Kochanowski, Grzegorz Leszczyński, and Grzegorz

clearly represented the limits of human endurance: the horrific life in the trenches, in the mud, sludge, and rain, in the cold and the stink, living daily with lice and rats amidst the corpses and body parts of fellow soldiers. Attempting the most visceral portrayal of the wartime reality, this literature aimed to provide as faithful a description of the events as possible. It related subjective experiences while documenting the synesthetic experiences of the subject—a feeling of spatial multidimensionality, an altered perception of color, and a tendency for the senses to blur. The result of these formal experiments was the dissolution of the borderline between "I" and the external reality. In these accounts, the "I" did not prevail over the world but rather was subjected to pain and suffering, passive and submissiveness in the face of these external forces.[13]

It must be underscored that the medium of the written word played a leading role in forming a vivid picture of the dreadfulness of (this) war—a clear picture of the corporeal experience of the war. Such literary documentation by soldiers was utilized by Modris Eksteins in his 1989 book *Rites of Spring*, a thrilling portrayal of the drama in the trenches as battlefield choreogra-

Mędykowski. To date there are two journals depicting the war from a woman's perspective, one from the perspective of a coconspirator of the Polish Military Organization, and one from the point of view of a local social activist. See Jarosław Kita and Piotr Zawilski, eds., *Trochę się zazdrości tym, co nie dożyli tych czasów … Dziennik Ludwiki Ostrowskiej z Maluszyna* (Warsaw: Naczelna Dyrekcja Archiwów Państwowych, 2014); Anna Wajs, ed., *Ta wojna zmieni wszystko … Dziennik Janiny Gajewskiej* (Warsaw: Naczelna Dyrekcja Archiwów Państwowych, 2014); Maria Frankel and Paweł Gut, eds., *Był czyn i chwała … Józef Gabriel Jęczkowiak Wspomnienia harcerza 1913–1918* (Warsaw: Naczelna Dyrekcja Archiwów Państwowych, 2015); Marek Wojtylak, ed., *Nie wybiła godzina wybawienia z otchłani nieszczęść … Kronika dziejów Łowicza Władysława Tarczyńskiego* (Warsaw: Naczelna Dyrekcja Archiwów Państwowych, 2015). Additionally, a very interesting analysis of personal documents from World War I is Katarzyna Sierakowska's *Śmierć – wygnanie – głód w dokumentach osobistych. Ziemie polskie w latach Wielkiej Wojny 1914–1918* (Warsaw: Instytut Historii PAN, 2015).

13 See Frank Ankersmit's remarks on the relationship between language and experience in "Language and Historical Experience," in *Meaning and Representation in History*, ed. Jörn Rüsen (New York: Berghahn, 2006), pp. 137–52.

phy and the blasts of armaments as a modern musical composition. In this model work, Eksteins uses a variety of source materials (from letters and news reports to prose) to reconstruct the experiences of a World War I soldier. He creates a historical/cultural narrative that transcends the dialectic of truth versus fiction, of credible documentation versus literary construct, and consequently challenges the unassailability of the "historical source." Eksteins has shifted the possibilities for how experience is mediated. This is well illustrated in a passage where the author uses the loaded question "Can we exaggerate the horrors of trench life?" to polemicize with historians who criticized, both just after the war and into the present day, the focus on the nightmares of Verdun, the Somme, and Ypres in works that sensationalized the "mud and blood" and thus skewed—in their opinion—the realities of war, which otherwise consisted of dull and "humdrum problems of trench existence."[14]

> Part of the problem in this debate is a matter of definition and semantics. What sort of experience does one classify under "horror" and what constitutes "boredom"? Cannot one man's horror be another man's boredom, and vice versa? If one insists that horror is the sensation aroused solely by the *unexpected* contradiction of values and conditions that bestow meaning on life, and that in turn boredom is the inevitable upshot of routine, even of routine slaughter, then the question can never be resolved, because no sense of horror, even one caused by this war, can remain constant.[15]

Eksteins's methodology comes from his deep consideration of the status of documentation, the function of media and the ways in which World War I narratives were constructed even as the war was ongoing. The literary approach to representing the experiences of soldiers was, after all, a fixture in the pages

14 Eksteins, *Rites of Spring*, pp. 153–54.
15 Ibid., p. 154.

of daily papers, not confined to solely the literary columns but rather in all reports from the front. Likewise in the Polish press, especially from the Prussian partition, where Poles marched alongside German forces to the Western front and took part in all of the greatest battles, do we find battlefield accounts that seem highly influenced by a literary method of wartime narration. In the first half of 1916 *Kurier Poznański* published a series called "Letters from Belgium," written in Polish by anonymous soldiers to their countrymen, in which it is easy to notice the influence of European-front literature (especially French and German) and its means of portraying the World War I experience. On January 25, 1916, a soldier identifying himself as "X" reports:

> Dawn—we march. Machine guns stutter; a hail of grenades, landmines and bullets rains down—we push on. Anyone left between the trenches—those who have gotten lost or have retreated—are surely lost. [...] The advancing line thins—some fall and some get up or remain motionless where they fell. The rest are in the trenches. [...] There is no use for bayonets in the cramped trench—they are used as a knife or a stiletto—shrapnel falls down on heads, crushing helmets and skulls—brains and blood spatter—bones crack. [...] I have witnessed two or three scenes—short, horrific—never to be forgotten.[16]

Meanwhile, "L" reports:

> It rains and rains without end, so, unless it is necessary, we stay put in our burrows. The men are always hunched, unable to stand up straight, always one man lying in the ground and the other sitting at a table, otherwise we cannot move! Our holes are even tighter than a month ago—so much water gathers that the floor must be raised every few days so as not to wade in mud. This is a dreadful prison, which I will remember until I die [...] We completely lose track of time; we don't care if it's day

16 "Letters from Belgium," in *Kurier Poznański* 76, April 1, 1916, supplement.

Fig. 6: Squadron sanitary facility, bathing during delousing, Wołczesk 1916.

> or night [...] When will that new life with daily work begin? When will I have that quiet, clear, warm happiness of home? All of it is an imaginary paradise for which I sigh—a prisoner in a rat cage.[17]

The mingling of personal document and literature made it impossible to distinguish fact from fiction, and certainly bred distrust of personal documents as a credible historical source, which in turn led to an inclination towards film as a new medium promising an ostensibly objective picture of reality. This allowed literature to explore more deeply the human as soldier—delving into the psychological aspects of warfare and even formulating anthropological concepts from the greatly biological experience of war. On the one hand we may speak of the fundamental opposition of humans versus other living

17 "Letters from Belgium," in *Kurier Poznański* 87, April 14, 1916, supplement.

Fig. 7: Soldiers and dogs in gas masks, ca. 1916 –1917.

things, which manifested in a "second war"[18], declared on species like lice and fleas, which fed on dirty and sweaty bodies, and especially rats, multiplying among the fresh corpses in the trenches and foraging on human remains in bombarded cemeteries, ruined households, and upturned fields. On the other hand, in personal literary treatments of these experiences, the body of the soldier was often depicted in relation to the mate-

18 See Éric Baratay, *Le Point de vue animal. Une autre version de l'histoire* (Paris: Seuil, 2012), p. 325.

riality of the wounded or dead bodies of brothers in arms and to dead animals decaying in the trenches. World War I represents the peak of the military use of horses, donkeys, mules, and dogs: "This both old-fashioned and modern conflict still needs animals—before they are made redundant by motor vehicles—and consumes them like it does men, on an industrial scale."[19] The treatment of animals as cannon fodder evoked in soldiers a sense of shared effort, injury, exhaustion, terror, and suffering with the animals. Dogs, much like humans, were killed by "shrapnel, which easily found the delicate points of their low bodies, as well as by gas, to which they are particularly vulnerable."[20] Even more frightening were the effects of gas on species of the horse family: "Exposed to the effects of irritant gas, they experience pain in the throat and lungs, which could cause sudden death from respiratory or cardiac arrest; caustic gases resulted in burns to the lower extremities and to the skin in contact with the harness straps."[21] Because of their massive presence on the battlefields, horse cadavers became a symbol of the war.[22] The battlefield was covered in the remains of men and horses, the latter, as Éric Baratay claims, sometimes affecting soldiers more deeply than the sight of human corpses: dead horses with their innards spilling out on the ground "assumed unnatural poses, legs up, bodies twisted, entrails exposed, with expressions of exceptional suffering."[23]

In the ever-present and inescapable dampness, all the human and animal deaths meant that a horrendous stench was generated by the corpses and created appalling images of monstrous forms arising from the mixture of human remains and soil. In a sense, "the animal experience, tangible and conspicuous," magnified "the general sense of being reduced to a

19 Ibid., p. 36.
20 Ibid., p. 210.
21 Ibid., p. 222.
22 Ibid., p. 322.
23 Ibid.

similar state, of being sent to the slaughter and being killed in the same manner."[24] Perhaps for that reason, the body of the Great War soldier seemed like just more detritus—living and at the same time dead; dead and at the same time living. Dissolving, like organic remains in the elements, the body possessed a regenerative power as a non-individual force of nature. "'I can see crawling things down there' 'Yes, as though they were alive'—'Some sort of plant, perhaps'—'Some kind of men'."[25] Such a vision of "fallen angels" organically fused by death opens Barbusse's story. In the critical reconstruction (memory) of the experience of the Great War soldier, this scene depicting dead soldiers like "the dreadful castaways of a shipwreck" emerging from the "streaming plain, seamed and seared with long parallel canals and scooped into water-holes," coming up from the "mud of war" and "revealing at least a bourgeoning will"[26] makes a decisive impact.

This very specific relationship between subject and experience, and between life and death, was captured by Walter Benjamin several years after the war in his essay *Erfahrung und Armut* (*Experience and Poverty*, 1932):

> [T]his much is clear: experience has fallen in value, amid a generation which from 1914 to 1918 had to experience some of the most monstrous events in the history of the world. Perhaps this is less remarkable than it appears. Wasn't it noticed at the time how many people returned from the front in silence? Not richer but poorer in communicable experience? And what poured out from the flood of war books ten years later was anything but the experience that passes from mouth to ear. There is nothing remarkable about that. For never has experience been contradicted more thoroughly: strategic experience has been contravened by positional warfare; economic experience,

24 Ibid., p. 323.
25 Barbusse, *Under Fire*, p. 4.
26 Ibid.

> by the inflation; physical experience, by hunger; moral experiences, by the ruling powers. A generation that had gone to school in horse-drawn streetcars now stood in the open air, amid a landscape in which nothing was the same except the clouds and, at its center, in a force field of destructive torrents and explosions, the *tiny, fragile human body*. (emphasis added)[27]

In Benjamin's eyes, World War I is undoubtedly a paradigmatic event, one consequence of which was the necessity to reformulate the erstwhile narrative on humanity. Those who survived returned home practically mute, unable to share their experience with others or tell their stories. For Benjamin, the war's far extremes of experience also meant the end of the traditional narrative on art, of the erstwhile means of recording and describing reality; transformations in artistic production were inseparable from fundamental shifts in personal and collective experience (*aisthesis*). Thus the war ushered in a total representational crisis, whose origins Benjamin identifies in an elementary disturbance to the individual means of experiencing reality: through the temporal and spatial disorientation resulting from warfare or from waiting interminably in the trenches; through the compromised body integrity caused by damage from bombs, grenades, explosions, and the boundaryless weapon that was gas; and through the psychological torment brought about by extreme acoustic overload. The results of this very real situation of the individual in the war zone were social, cultural, and artistic processes that generated progressively greater fragmentation and secularization in the survivors.

27 Walter Benjamin, "Experience and Poverty" (1933), in Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings Volume 2* (1927–34), ed. Michael W. Jennings, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 1999), pp. 731–32. This fragment reappears in nearly identical form in "The Storyteller: Reflections on the Works of Nikolai Leskov," in Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn, ed. and intro. Hannah Arendt, preface Leon Wieseltier (New York: Schocken Books, [1969] 2007), p. 83.

For Benjamin, the old notion of experience (*Erfahrung*), which presumed a linear perception of time and a traditional understanding of community (the passing on of history from generation to generation, organic time complying with the rhythm of nature, education based on authoritative examples), was replaced, in the shock of warfare, by another type of experience (*Erlebnis*), which relates solely to the subject, now understood as a unique, exceptional, fragile being, utterly alienated and vulnerable to damage. This is experience that, as a momentary event, as a product of the individual being bombarded, literally and figuratively, by sensations, reaches the subject's consciousness only in a fragmentary manner. The subject is incapable of integrating the surplus of stimuli, which in turn leads to his being unable to maintain his relation to other phenomena, and thus to his sense of belonging within time and space.[28]

> Poverty of experience. This should not be understood to mean that people are yearning for new experience. No, they long to free themselves from experience; they long for a world in which they can make such pure and decided use of their poverty—their outer poverty, und ultimately also their inner poverty—that it will lead to something respectable. Nor are they ignorant or inexperienced. Often we could say the very opposite. They have "devoured" everything, both "culture and people," and they have had such a surfeit that it has exhausted them.[29]

The fragility of life experienced in war was, in Benjamin's eyes, connected to the process of social destabilization and existential uncertainty. Yet from the extreme conditions of war

28 Writing in detail on Benjamin's concept of experience and ordeal is Karol Sauerland in the text "Przeżycie i doświadczenie, czyli jeszcze raz o Walterze Benjaminie," in *Od Diltheya do Adorna. Studia z estetyki niemieckiej* (Warsaw: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1986), pp. 149–66.

29 Benjamin, "Experience and Poverty," p. 734.

there also emerged a specific kind of vitality—after all, even in the trenches there was everyday life and the imperative to live, with its incumbent need to organize one's existence, to get by in a given situation. For this reason, Benjamin interpreted the new cultural poverty—a poverty of experience—as a condition for a new beginning, some new construct, even if it was the inevitable by-product of cultural barbarism—the product of war.

> Barbarism? Yes, indeed. We say this in order to introduce a new, positive concept of barbarism. For what does poverty of experience do for the barbarian? It forces him to start from scratch; to make a new start; to make a little go a long way; to begin with a little and build up further, looking neither left nor right. Among the great creative spirits, there have always been the inexorable ones who begin by clearing a tabula rasa. They need a drawing table, they were constructors.[30]

In the cultural remains of modernity, Benjamin perceives a constructive potential—a potential sparked by a gap between experience (based on sanctioned repetitiveness) and ordeal (in the form of a traumatic overload of energy)—in which I find space for what I call necroperformance. The notion of necroperformance reveals the divorce of the systems of perception and consciousness—which Benjamin discovered in the experience of World War I—which engendered new means of conveying experience other than traditional forms of recording and memory.

Thus World War I brought with it not only disillusionment but also a specific kind of relationship between aesthetics and politics. This catastrophe opening the 20th century—perceived by some as the explosion of modernity, by others as a sign of the breakdown of classic modernism[31]—proved to be

30 Ibid., p. 732.

31 See Eksteins, *Rites of Spring*; see also Detlev J. K. Peukert, *The Weimar Republic: The Crisis of Classical Modernity*, trans. Richard Deveson (New York: Hill & Wang, 1992).

groundbreaking not only in the way it was fought, shattering all traditional notions of warfare, but also because all of industry, the whole economy, all financial resources, and even the tax systems were bled dry for the war effort.[32] The confrontation with the reality of the war—its unprecedented brutality, dehumanization, physical and psychological humiliation—also inspired a previously unheard of level of mediatization, with cameras recording practically everything that took place.

At this moment when modern killing technology was implemented to put an end to the relentless imprisonment in the trenches, when, as it was said, "the German factory [was] absorbing the world,"[33] and when the intertwining of fact and fiction served to fictionalize actual events, words were replaced by pictures. The traditional form of war, still describable, ended once and for all in 1915 when the Germans first used gas as a weapon at Ypres. The response was the introduction of gas masks, which, while protecting the men's faces, also mercilessly deformed them: "When men donned their masks they lost the sign of humanity, and with their long snouts, large glass eyes, and slow movements, they became figures of fantasy [...]."[34] Progress in science and technology meant the ever greater implementation of progressively more sophisticated extensions of the body—machine guns and all sorts of long-range weapons, but also cameras. These extensions put a distance between the killer and the dehumanized enemy, making it easier to kill.

Without a doubt, film became an invaluable medium for documenting the effectiveness of modern projectiles, chemical warfare, mechanized weapons, tanks, flamethrowers, and mortar. It was able to keep up with the dynamics of the war, and using telephoto lenses it could reveal the most macabre damage

32 See Eksteins, *Rites of Spring*.
33 Ibid., p. 223.
34 Ibid., p. 163.

done to bodies by the modern weaponry: foaming mouths, watering eyes, shot and burned faces, severed limbs, and, ultimately, piles of corpses—torn to bits, unidentifiable, buried on the spot by still-living fellow soldiers. "The other men," wrote one surviving soldier after the war, "were like figures on a cinematrograph screen—an old film that flickered violently—everybody in a desperate hurry."[35]

Though no new media were invented during World War I, what did seem new was the potential reach and impact of existing tools of information and persuasion. The nature of the communication also changed, both for old media (photography, press, posters, leaflets) and new (film); once tools in the service of sense and meaning, media were now assigned a more active role, charged with having an impact and inciting change. In his essay "War and Photography" (1930), Ernst Jünger even compared photo cameras to the weapons being used at the time:

> Day in and day out, optical lenses were pointed at the combat zones alongside the mouths of rifles and cannons. [...] Indeed, we even possess pictures which originated in moments of close combat, lucky accidental shots of the camera, aimed by hands that relinquished the rifle or grenade for a second in order to click the shutter.[36]

In recognizing the massive scale on which visual media proliferated during the war, and in recognizing their effectiveness, there is much more to acknowledge than just their use as a war propaganda tool. Similarly, visual media were not limited to the circumstance in which—as Benjamin wrote disapprovingly—the masses became the subject of the new visual media (and their new "protector"), since these media had been subordinated to market conditions. The result of the unlimited

35 Ibid., p. 223.
36 Ernst Jünger, "War and Photography," in *New German Critique* 59 (spring–summer 1993), pp. 24–25.

distribution of images of and among masses, a process encouraged by technical reproduction, was the transformation of memory into a discursive, legible field; and the reduction of "the scope for the play of the imagination.[37] The core of the issue is much more complex, however: what we are dealing with is the mass management of the image of the soldier through the redefinition and rationing of the visual field. In her book *Frames of War*, Judith Butler even argues that imagery in and of itself is in fact an element in the waging of a modern war.[38] And, she claims, it does so in a very particular way: "Although we reserve some sense of materiality for the image, we tend to give priority to that materiality that belongs to guns, bombs, and the directly destructive instruments of war without realizing that they cannot operate without the image.[39]

Montage Strategies and Reconstruction Practices in Media Images of Violence

It is not surprising that one of the key elements of the new aesthetics was montage, which shattered—as a reflection of the turbulence of war—all continuity. Smashing together all sorts of fragmentary, experienced, and remembered pictures of cruelty with no regard for depicting reality in a consistent, uniform, or rational manner, montage emphasized the conflict, contradictions, and complexity of the events. Before Sergei Eisenstein, Vsevolod Pudovkin, and Béla Balázs worked out their principles of montage, which proved so fundamental to aesthetic and media theory, montage—understood as a structural and compositional artistic technique based on radical cuts and

37 See Walter Benjamin, "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire," in *Illuminations*, p. 186.
38 Judith Butler, *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?* (New York: Verso, [2009] 2010), p. xi.
39 Ibid.

contrasting juxtapositions—was a basic approach in the performance activity of the Dadaists. Dadaism, being an artistic expression of the experience of World War I—a protest against the war, as well as a death knell for the bourgeois world, its ideals, culture, art, and values—devised a concept for a renewed language of aesthetics and politics through the montage of heterogeneous elements, and did so upon the rubble of the old world and its culture. The relationship between aesthetics and politics became particularly apparent in the work of the Berlin Dadaists, inspired by Richard Huelsenbeck, the cofounder of the Cabaret Voltaire in Zurich. The artists and intellectuals of the Berlin Dada movement demonstratively placed their artistic output in the service of the proletariat, subjugating it to the class struggle and the communist party, while also outlining new aesthetic models and strategies. These found expression in the work of George Grosz, Raoul Hausmann, and John Heartfield, among others. It was no accident that Heartfield—a creator of photomontages that deftly combined politics and satire, didactics and entertainment, social protest and irony—came to be known as the Monteurdada.

Asked years later about how his photomontages came about, Heartfield unhesitatingly claimed they arose from the experience of World War I, when he saw for the first time how photos could be used to simultaneously lie and tell the truth:

> I became a soldier early on. We pasted, I pasted; I quickly cut out pictures and pasted them on top of each other. That obviously gave birth to a counterpoint, a paradox, a completely new message. That was when the idea arose. It wasn't yet clear for me where it would lead to and that it would take me to photomontage.[40]

40 John Heartfield interviewed by Bengt Dahlbäck (1967), in *John Heartfield*, catalogue for an exhibition at Akademie der Künste zu Berlin, concept and ed. Peter Pachnicke and Klaus Honnef (Cologne: DuMont Buchverlag, 1991), p. 14.

Heartfield's world of images, often found randomly in the material of everyday life, was rendered, with the use of scissors and glue, as a kaleidoscope of "rhetorical figures of human gestures and speech."[41] It is therefore no wonder that Heartfield's postwar output—newspapers, books, programs, and posters—would serve as the raw material for a specific reconstruction of reality, one that would reveal what in the everyday view was to remain concealed, unseen: the face of the ruling class, and thus the ideological underpinnings of a society built on class inequity.[42] An openness to the mass-reproduced world of images, and the resulting political intervention based on a change in the means of representing events known to the masses through mass media, made it possible for Heartfield—much like Eisenstein and Chaplin later[43]—to create a "'material revolution' which actually impacted the public."[44]

World War I brought about the breakdown not only of the geopolitical and social foundation of Europe but also of the modern aesthetics developed by that culture, based on categories like linearity, composition, plot, action, illusion, and synthesis. This was aptly encapsulated by Georges Didi-Huberman in his *The Eye of History: When Images Take Position:*

> It is as though, historically speaking, the trenches opened up in Europe during the Great War had inspired, in the field of aesthetics as well as in the arts [...], the decision *to show through montage*, that is to say, through the dismantling and re-composition of everything. Montage was both a method of knowing and a formal process born during

41 Peter Pachnicke, "Moralisch rigoros und visuell gefräßig," in ibid., p. 31.
42 Many of his photomontages reflected the political conflict between two workers' parties: the Social-Democratic Party of Germany and the Communist Party of Germany, the latter of which he was a member.
43 It was the Berlin Dadaists who called Chaplin "the world's greatest artist and a good Dadaist" ("DADA in Europe," *Der dada* no. 3, April [1920], p. 437); they were also the ones who organized the 1920 protest against the censorship of Chaplin's films in Germany.
44 Pachnicke, "Moralisch rigoros und visuell gefräßig," p. 28.

> the war; it accounted for the "disorder of the world." It has characterized our perception of time since the first conflicts of the twentieth century; it has become "the modern method" par excellence.[45]

Didi-Huberman examines this new alignment of aesthetics and politics in his book as he delves into the poetics of Bertolt Brecht, whose work is a perfect example of montage art based on arranging differences, "dis-posing things," and the "disorganization of their order of appearing."[46] Didi-Huberman searches for the exemplification of the strategy of colliding heterogeneous elements, of ways to put together things that were initially apart, not in Brecht's plays but rather in his non-dramatic works, written while in exile and unable to work in the theatre. Didi-Huberman finds the very idea of epic theatre preserved by Brecht in images of war in his *Arbeitsjournal* (Work Journal, 1938–55), a peculiar documentation of his working process as a theatre artist and in *Kriegsfibel* (War Primer, 1944), an extraordinary collection of photos and short poems. The latter work in particular, described in *The Eye of History* as "the most Benjaminian book Bertolt Brecht ever wrote"[47] and as a visual repository of knowledge, well illustrates Didi-Huberman's thesis that the mere act of creating a montage of heterogeneous elements is "taking a position," which is key from the political perspective. This however does not entail taking a side but rather relies on the confronting "of each image regarding the others, of all the images regarding history—and this in turn puts the photographic collection itself into the perspective of a new work of *political imagination*."[48] *Kriegsfibel*, a collection of photos from the war accompanied by short poetic commentaries by Brecht, constitutes just such a montage of text and image, document and poetry, politics and

45 Georges Didi-Huberman, *The Eye of History: When Images Take Position*, trans. Shane B. Lillis (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2018), p. 78.
46 Ibid.
47 Ibid., p. 111.
48 Ibid.

aesthetics. Thanks to the formal approach of juxtaposing documentary photographs and Brecht's epigrams, it was possible, according to Didi-Huberman, to unmask both the cruelty of war and the cynicism of the politics leading up to it, without putting forth a treatise on history.

Didi-Huberman's reflections on the function of images in Brecht's conception of epic theatre must certainly be viewed from the wider perspective of the French philosopher's interest in the montage of images, in particular his fascination with Aby Warburg's *Mnemosyne Atlas*. This enormous and unfinished work, assembled from 1924 to 1929 as a collection of images to be viewed in various configurations and thematic contexts, became a wellspring for a peculiar archeology of visual art rejecting traditional art history methodology. A key role here was played by photography, which mediates other works—paintings, miniatures, sculpture, fragments of building friezes, graphic art, handicrafts, as well as newspaper clippings and postage stamps—and thus renders them "comparable." The belief in the post-mortal life (*das Nachleben*) of images, in the phantom existence of images, in their spectral nature, which allows them to return and to haunt, as well as the formation of a model of critical thinking that integrates extreme and sublime emotions ("formulae of pathos," *Pathosformel*), are just a few of the ideas that Didi-Huberman mines in Warburg's atlas, ideas that he anointed as the foundation of the contemporary turn toward an anthropology of images.[49] The intention here is not to reconstruct Didi-Huberman's multi-year study of Warburg or the connections linking their respective theories on images—there is extensive and highly competent literature devoted to the subject already. What is significant here is rather to outline

49 See above all Georges Didi-Huberman, *L'image survivante. Histoire de l'art et temps des fantômes selon Aby Warburg* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 2002). On the ties between art history and anthropology, see also the 2011 issue of *Konteksty* 2–3 on "Aby Warburg. Nasz bliźni."

the background for the interpretation of Brecht's epic theatre in *The Eye of History* and to identify the ties between *Atlas* (a montage of images) and the archive, as defined by Didi-Huberman during his study of Warburg's work.

As the creator of the *Atlas* exhibition based on the book's montage of archival images, held at the Museo Reina Sofia in Madrid in 2010, Didi-Huberman himself clearly had to take a position on the matter of the archive. More than just theoretical exercise, transplanting Warburg's ideas and practices to his own curatorial activity allowed Didi-Huberman to develop the conviction that an album of images differs fundamentally from the economy of the archive: "The atlas gives us an Übersicht in its discontinuities, an exposition of differences, where the archive drowns the differences in a volume that cannot be exposed to sight, in the continuous mass of its compacted multitude."[50] The archive is by its nature an unfinished collection of documents, unable to expose and dramatize the chaotic past. The atlas, in a visual form but as a performative gesture, is knowledge based on the argumentation of the images amongst themselves, established in the intervals of images, forced into conversation by their juxtaposition, inclined to making an impact, rousing the viewer and spurring them to action.

> The atlas offers us panoramic tables, where the archive forces us first of all to gest lost among boxes. [...] There would, of course, be no atlas possible without the archive, which precedes: The atlas offers in this sense the "becoming-sight" and the "becoming-knowledge" of the archive. It extracts from it the anthropological salience right up to the emphasis of pathos that Foucault [...] refers to the necessary dramatization of knowledge and, therefore, to a certain position-taking in the question of memory, of genealogy, and of archeology.[51]

50 Georges Didi-Huberman, *Atlas, or the Anxious Gay Science*, trans. Shane Lillis (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018), p. 250.
51 Ibid.

Though Didi-Huberman's diagnosis invites the causative dimension of images to the consideration of their strategy, it is hard to resist the impression that the perspective presented by the author is radically and almost exclusively visual: the thought processes operating here (even the critical ones) go back and forth between the image and knowledge. Realizing this fact makes it possible to better understand why, in his book on Brecht, the French philosopher provides an excellent explanation of the notion of epic theatre through the prism of political montage while also not identifying a feature no less vital than the image—and perhaps even more significant—that is, the function of the body as an archive in Brecht's theatre. This double-edged relationship is discussed by Benjamin (referenced by Didi-Huberman extensively), who indicated that the dialectic function of the image in Brecht's work comes from the very core of the documented gesture. The gesture is an elementary particle of the language of the epic theatre, and its substantial achievement is "making gestures quotable."[52] In the first version of his essay *What Is Epic Theatre* (1931) Benjamin wrote:

> Epic theatre is gestural. […]. The gesture is its raw material and its task is the rational utilization of this material. The gesture has two advantages over the highly deceptive statements and assertions normally made by people and their many-layered and opaque actions. First, the gesture is falsifiable only up to a point; in fact, the more inconspicuous and habitual it is, the more difficult it is to falsify. Second, unlike people's actions and endeavors, it has a definable beginning and a definable end. Indeed, this strict, frame-like, enclosed nature of each moment of an attitude, which, after all, is as a whole in a state of living flux, is one of the basic dialectical characteristics of the gesture. This

52 Walter Benjamin, "What is Epic Theatre?" [Second Version], in Walter Benjamin, *Understanding Brecht*, trans. Anna Bostock, intro. Stanley Mitchell (New York: Verso, 1998), p. 19.

> leads to an important conclusion: the more frequently we interrupt someone engaged in an action, the more gestures we obtain.[53]

In speaking of the interruption of action that is so key to epic theatre, Benjamin was by no means referring simply to the gesture being frozen in the image. Thanks to frequent interruptions of the action, executed in a manner befitting the new technical forms of film and radio, it elicits vivid involvement from the audience while also allowing the viewers to "freely switch on or off at any moment."[54] Thus, in Brecht's theatre, Benjamin is interested in the numerous techniques used, including those more performative than strictly visual, "the retarding quality of these interruptions and the episodic quality of this framing of action," like "Brecht's songs with their crude, heartrending refrains."[55]

Benjamin's beliefs are well supported not only by Brecht's plays, whose power lies in the montage/combination of dissociated words, images, and music, but most of all by the fact that the publication of *Kriegsfibel* preceded its staging at the Soto Jewish Center in Boyle Heights, Los Angeles. The performance was a montage of images presented as a slide show and fourteen epigrams spoken by the Austrian actor Fritz Kortner, accompanied by a small orchestra, vocalists, and a choir, performing a composition by Hans Eisler.[56] The awareness of the medium of the image being translated into a stage language does not necessarily bring about a fundamental change in the meaning of *Kriegsfibel,* but rather evokes the hidden and forgotten dimension of

53 Ibid., p. 3.
54 Ibid., p. 6.
55 Ibid., p. 3–4.
56 Kenneth H. Marcus, *Schoenberg and Hollywood Modernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), pp. 214–15. Marcus cites this information from the essay by David Steinau, "Relationships Among Photograph, Poem and Song in Brecht's *Kriegsfiebel* and Eisler's *Bilder aus der Kriegsfibel*," German Studies Association, Thirty-Fourth Annual Conference, Oakland, October 7–10, 2010.

this seemingly strictly visual archive of the war. Eisler's composition thus went on to subsequent stagings, a particularly interesting one being a new adaptation comprising Brecht's texts and Eisler's music, developed by Jörg Mischke in 2003 and produced in collaboration with the actor Kathrin Angerer, from the Volksbühne in Berlin. The collaborative CD arising from this adaptation was in turn presented in the form of a *Kriegsfibel* music/theatre night on March 27, 2004, at the Roter Salon in Berlin. In this way, Brecht's *Kriegsfibel* achieved post-mortal life in which theatre transformed the visual archive into a body-archive subject to ongoing stage repetition.

In *Mother Courage and Her Children*, hailed as Brecht's most epic play, I identify a similar status as a performative archive of images. The rather ahistorical reflection on anthropology and aesthetics put forth by Didi-Huberman in his *Eye of History* prevented him from seeing that, after emigrating to the United States, Brecht not only worked on elucidating the visual montage form through his development of epic theatre but also on a script for a pacifist play concerning the Thirty Years' War, Brecht's own theatrical archive of war. Behind the creation of *Mother Courage* are the author's own experiences, which were integral to this project: emigrants, forced into an uncertain existence and often deprived of the basic means of living—representatives of contemporary German culture. Let us remember that the first version of the text arose in late 1938/early 1939, during Brecht's European exile (precisely during his time in Sweden, just after he abandoned the famed house in Svendborg, Denmark), but its premiere took place during World War II. In fact it was in 1941 when Brecht's play was staged in the Schauspielhaus in Zurich, shortly before his departure for the United States. Brecht obtained a visa only in May 1941, and traveled via Moscow to Vladivostok, and then by ship to Santa Monica, California, where, as an enemy alien, he spent the following six years. After testifying before the House Un-American Activities Commission on October 30, 1947, Brecht was permit-

ted to return to Europe, initially to Paris and Zurich, and finally to East Berlin in 1948. It was there that on January 11, 1949, the German premiere of *Mother Courage* took place, with Helene Weigel in the leading role.

With the success of *Mother Courage*, Brecht began work on *Couragemodell*—a visual performance archive without precedent in all of theatre history. It mainly comprised a collection of photographs taken by Ruth Berlau and Heiner Hill, who documented stage scenes and gestures in minute detail, almost frame-by-frame, fulfilling through the medium of photography what Benjamin had proposed in his essay on epic theatre concerning the use of frequent interruptions in the stage action. This body-archive, along with the accompanying directorial cues and the author's conceptual commentary, became an exceptional text. The publication became the basis for future stagings of Brecht's play; it was a matrix for future incarnations of the title role by other actors and, thus, other bodies expressing their own stories. The final version of this very specific war primer—finally published 1958 by the author's longtime collaborator and the photographer for *Mother Courage*, Ruth Berlau—was influenced both by the idea of a visual war archive, formed during Brecht's work on *Kriegsfibel* in exile, and by Brecht's conceptualization of a new, epic model of acting. For Brecht, the most important aim of the book was "the art of learning how to read images," a conviction he formulated much earlier about the impact of mass media. "Photography in the hands of the bourgeoisie has turned into a monstrous weapon against truth,"[57] he declared in 1931, summing up what he observed to be the manipulation of photographic documentation to promote militarism and capitalism.

57 In Jan Knopf, "Kriegsfibel," in *Brecht-Handbuch. Lyrik, Prosa, Schriften. Eine Ästhetik der Widersprüche* (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzlersche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1984), p. 205.

Didi-Huberman's extremely visual perspective, aiming to create a typology of Brecht's montage method, obscures the relationship between the body and the image that was so fundamental to the playwright, even after he stopped writing plays. Didi-Huberman's inclination toward aesthetic categorization also neglects the historicity of the photo collection, in particular the means of representing the body, which took shape as a consequence of World War I, and which, in my opinion, had a crucial influence on Brecht's aesthetic and political views. The current historiographic paradigm, which since the 1980s has been shaped in Western culture by studies on memory—chiefly as a response to the Holocaust and the trauma of World War II—has overshadowed the significance of World War I. Therefore it should come as no surprise that Didi-Huberman, as he examines the issue of the (non-)representability of the Shoah in *Images in Spite of All*, reads this visual work by Brecht as a direct commentary on the experience of World War II.

A connection between Bertolt Brecht and World War I, meanwhile, was identified by the outstanding German playwright Heiner Müller as he prepared an adaptation of Brecht's unfinished play *Downfall of the Egotist Johann Fatzer*, written in 1926–30 and known also as *Fatzer Fragment* or simply *Fatzer*. One primary storyline in the play sets up the murders of Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg as a "beheading of the German communist party, and giving that head to Lenin."[58] Müller sees the fragmented structure of the play as a manifestation of the fragmented nature of the German history. Still in the 1950s, the future author of *Hamletmachine* went over the fragments of the texts that Brecht stopped working on in 1932 for political reasons. In the 1978 "'Fatzer'-Material," this is how Müller describes his working process on the play's fragments at Brecht's archive:

58 Heiner Müller, "'Fatzer'-Material" (1978), in Heiner Müller, *Eine Autobiographie* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2005), p. 242.

> In the room I was working in, I laid out all four-hundred pages on the floor and I walked among them looking for ones that fit together. I also made some arbitrary connections, ones that Brecht surely would not have considered; it was like doing a puzzle.[59]

Using bits of scenes and situations, and Brecht's numerous attempts to write further versions of the play, Müller arrived at an original, montage-based reconstruction of *Fatzer Fragment.* The main topic of Brecht's play focusing on a group of revolutionaries who desert from World War I is processed in Müller's reconstruction through the prism of then current political events connected with the actions of the Rote Armee Fraktion (Red Army Faction), a far-left militant organization also known as the Baader-Meinhof Group, active in the 1970s in West Germany. Müller inscribed discipline and terror into the experience of World War I by his identification of the war as the moment in which modern biopower and necropolitics were born. This was when "the state took over killing,"[60] leading to the bureaucratization and monopolization of violence and to the control over death.

Downfall of the Egotist Johann Fatzer is a unique document—a piece of stage evidence proving that Brecht deeply internalized the experience of World War I, which he understood only after his experience of World War II. Unlike many of his peers and successors—including Ernst Toller, Erwin Piscator, Otto Dix, Walter Hasenclever, Max Beckmann, and Georg Grosz[61]—Brecht never found himself on the front lines, being instead assigned to auxiliary services on account of his poor health. So from the very beginning, he took part in the war from a distance, which nevertheless does not diminish his emotional engagement. This

59 Ibid., pp. 242–43.
60 Ibid., p. 244.
61 I write more on this wartime generation in the book *Pod okupacją mediów* (chap. "Przestrzenie radykalnej demokracji") (Warsaw: Książka i Prasa, 2012).

not only allowed him to take a direct position on the violence of war, but also opened the door to his intensive and broad education in Munich, where he studied medicine and philosophy and attended lectures given by one of the fathers of German *Theaterwissenschaft*, Artur Kutscher. As it turned out, Brecht's medical studies proved most useful—on October 1, 1918, the playwright was conscripted into the army and assigned to a military hospital in his hometown of Augsburg.[62] He wore a military uniform for just a few weeks, working in a quarantine center that treated infectious and venereal diseases, and so did not see soldiers' bodies ravaged by bombs, grenades, and shrapnel. Still, he did encounter suffering, pain, and death. It was the duty of transporting corpses that had the greatest impact on him. At the same time his indirect involvement with the violence of war, bred in him an ironic and cynical perspective on the war,[63] which came to be a trademark of his output. This was foreshadowed in his poem "The Legend of the Dead Soldier," written during the war[64] and later popularized in numerous musical adaptations. It tells the story of the exhumation of the remains of a fallen soldier by a military medical commission adjudicating the fitness of the body, or rather its remains, and issuing the order for its reassignment to the front. The opening stanzas of the poem:

> And when the war reached its final spring
> With no hint of a pause for breath
> The soldier did the logical thing
> And died a hero's death.

62 See Roman Szydłowski, *Brecht. Opowieść biograficzna* (Warsaw: Ludowa Spółdzielnia Wydawnicza, 1986), pp. 62, 63.

63 Peter Sloterdijk calls Brecht "a real virtuoso of the cynical structure." See Peter Sloterdijk, *Critique of Cynical Reason*, trans. Michael Eldred (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), p. 441.

64 The exact date of the poem is undetermined. Brecht wrote several versions of the piece and provided various dates for its authorship—the years 1917, 1918, and 1919. Writing more on this subject is Jürgen Hillesheim in *Bertolt Brechts Augsburger Geschichten* (Augsburg: Verlagsgemeinschaft Augsbuch, 2005).

The war however was far from over,
And the Kaiser thought it a crime
That his soldier should be dead and gone
Before the proper time.

The summer spread over the makeshift graves
And the soldier lay ignored.
Until one night there came an official army medical board.

The board went out to the cemetery
With consecrated spade
And dug up what was left of him
For next day's sick parade.

Their doctor inspected what they'd found
Or as much as he thought would serve
And gave his report: "He's medically sound
He's merely lost his nerve."[65]

It is worth noting that a vast majority (57 out of 69) of the photographs comprising *Kriegsfibel* depict anonymous individuals, many of them wounded, suffering from injuries incurred in the war, and some of them no more than human remains. This mode of portraying the war thus becomes very concrete (Brecht's personal history) and strongly allegorical (reanimating the dead soldier). The cruelty that during World War I became the object of a peculiar visual pornography is here reconstructed via the dramatization of bodily remains and fragments of history. This way of examining war violence appears in a lot of critical commentary on the media portrayal of the Great War. Perhaps in Brecht's methods it is possible to discern a kinship with Warburg's *Kriegskarthotek,* a collection of

65 Bertolt Brecht, "Legend of the Dead Soldier," in *Bertolt Brecht: Bad Time For Poetry*, ed. and intro. John Willett (London: Methuen, 1995), pp. 5–8.

photos, postcards, and press clippings from World War I meant to form a visual archive "clearly intended to be a detailed analysis of wartime iconography and a demontage of its superficial and hidden meanings."[66] The remains of Warburg's extensive documentation on the Great War as an *Urkatastrophe* and a manifestation of the aporias of Western modernity has been included by Didi-Huberman in the aforementioned *Atlas* exhibition.[67] Didi-Huberman characteristically and rightly refers to the trenches of World War I as a cultural origin of montage, but only tentatively indicates a connection between the images that Brecht compiled and the means of media representation of violence that took shape during the war.

Didi-Huberman mentions the famous photograph album *Krieg dem Kriege* (War Against War, 1924), by Ernst Friedrich, when he discusses a World War II photo showing the skull of a Japanese soldier propped up on a burned-out Japanese tank by American troops. He finds a strong connection to Brecht's work, saying "Brecht's choice, in this sense, joins the political montages proposed in 1924 by Ernst Friedrich in his unbearable book of images *Krieg dem Kriege!*"[68] though he does not draw any conclusions from the fact that while working on *Kriegsfibel* Brecht took inspiration for how to represent the body from Friedrich's World War I critique. Analyzing the connections between *Kriegsfibel* and children's school books, which for Didi-Huberman highlights the specificity of Brecht's didacticism, he fails to take into account the fact that in 1921 (long before Brecht's work on *Kriegsfibel* and also prior to the crystallization of the idea for *Lehrstück*) Friedrich, a radical

66 For more on this topic, see Tomasz Szerszeń, "Demony wojny według Warburga 'Kriegskartothek,'" in *Konteksty* no. 2–3 (2011), p. 29.

67 During the relocation of Warburg's library from Hamburg to London in 1933, 1,445 of the total 5,000 photographs were rescued. See Georges Didi-Huberman, *Atlas, or the Anxious Gay Science*, p. 186.

68 Didi-Huberman, *The Eye of History*, p. 145.

pacifist,[69] had already published the booklet *Proletarischer Kindergarten. Ein Märchen- und Lesebuch für Groß und Klein* (Proletariat Kindergarten: A book of tales to be read by the young and the old), a textbook for pacifist education, illustrated by artists like Käthe Kollwitz, Karl Holtz, and Otto Nagel.

In Brecht's theatre work, a clear indication of the impact of Friedrich's album is in my opinion the precursor to his *Lehrstück*, which took place in 1929 in Baden-Baden.[70] In a scene reflective of the violence of war, two clowns, seemingly attempting to help a third, massacre clown three by cutting off limbs until all that is left of the man are mere human remains in a pool of blood. The overtly theatrical scene caused a scandal, among government officials as well in the theatre world, which spurred Brecht to expand the original version of his didactic play on human cruelty. In the subsequent iteration, published in 1930 under the title *The Baden-Baden Lesson on Consent*, the connection with Friedrich's representation of war and violence was evident in the scene preceding the clown number. Here, the Leader of the Chorus addresses the Crowd with these words: "Look on our pictures and then say / One man helps another!" after which he shows them "Twenty photographs showing how human beings slaughter one another in our times."[71] A phenomenal staging of this early *Lehrstück* by Frank Castorf in 2010 at Berlin's Volksbühne left no doubt as to the connection: appearing in the hands of the Leader, and then among the Crowd, was a copy of *Krieg dem Kriege!*

69 In August 1914 Friedrich was one of the few German men who refused to join the army. After this decision he was referred to a psychiatric clinic for observation. When he again rejected conscription in 1917, he was placed under arrest and incarcerated at the Potsdam prison, released only during the German Revolution in 1918.

70 Małgorzata Sugiera writes on the circumstances of this premiere and the reception of Brecht's other didactic plays in Małgorzata Sugiera, "Kolektywne uprawianie sztuki czyli Lehrstück Bertolta Brechta," in *Dialog* 9 (1997).

71 Bertolt Brecht, *The Baden-Baden Lesson on Consent*, trans. Geoffrey Skelton, in *Brecht Collected Plays: 3*, ed. John Willett (New York: Bloomsbury, 2015).

Initially published in four languages (German, English, French, and Dutch) and later translated into more than 50 other languages, Friedrich's *Krieg dem Kriege* was meant to show "the real face of war," as demonstrated over its many pages by photographs sourced from medical and military archives. Among them were pictures from the battlefield, showing piles of corpses, mass graves, crashed aircraft, and hanged soldiers, as well as macabre close-ups of the wounded. All of the photographs, usually arranged in pairs that offer reciprocal ironic or critical commentary, are accompanied by a caption, at times putting into words what can be seen in the image or otherwise explaining the cause and consequences of the depicted tragedy. Some of the pictures bear subtitles in the form of phrases taken from enemy war propaganda. One photo in particular was widely reproduced: a picture of a soldier deprived of half of his face by a grenade blast, with a caption quoting Field Marshal Paul von Hindenburg: *Der Krieg bekommt mir, wie eine Badekur!* (War agrees with me like a stay at a health resort!). This phrase resonates particularly forcefully when juxtaposed with the adjacent pages' deformed soldiers' bodies, which despite being subjected to extensive reconstructive surgery regained neither their original appearance nor functionality.

More than merely reflecting the critical relationship of the photo album to the archive that Didi-Huberman describes, Friedrich's album performs the gesture of a body-archive becoming visible by attempting to analyze how the images of war influenced the construct that became the 20th-century male. If we examine the visual representation of the "soldier's experience" in this light, the Great War evokes an internally contradictory picture of the male body: on the one hand, tough, defined, neat, dense as steel, flawlessly functioning as part of a cohesive group—responsible for the formation of a cultural construct of the 19th-century model of masculinity; and on the other hand soft, humid, deformed, fragmented, brittle—the

realistic body of a man/soldier.[72] The former body dominated the war propaganda narrative—ever present in the media machine set in motion at the beginning of the war and with the appearance of the first casualties—spectacularity manifested in among other things as frontline newspapers (in Germany alone, approximately 115 titles were published over the duration of the war[73]), propaganda films from the front, and documentary war films. The pictures they contained—of uniformed, mobilized men in file as a collective body, marching in rhythm as one—were responsible for generating the abstract corporality of the soldier.

It seems inevitable that the brittle body of the soldier would enter the field of cultural visibility in the representations of broken, deformed, and infected bodies in field hospitals. But if we look closely at the photographs capturing wounded human bodies, we discover that a peculiar rationing of the fragility of the human body took place in the lazarettos as well. What, after all, do the numerous photographs documenting life in field hospitals really show? Such photos admittedly constitute a very diverse group: from pictures taken at a distance and capturing a "collective" of the wounded and the medical staff, to staged surgery scenarios or other types of intrusions into the body, to close-ups of wounded body parts and even x-rays. These photos show the spontaneous necessity of the hastily erected spaces meant to serve as hospital facilities (under the open sky, inside churches, in random buildings, in freight train cars);

72 A hitherto unequalled analysis of these two types of corporeality can be found in Klaus Theweleit's 1977 book *Male Fantasies*, based on in-depth psychoanalytic research into war accounts, journals, and autobiographies of German Freikorps members of the early 1920s. See Klaus Theweleit, *Male Fantasies*, trans. Stephen Conway (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987 [vol. 1], 1989 [vol. 2]).

73 See Robert L. Nelson, "German Comrades—Slavic Whores: Gender Images in the German Soldier Newspapers of the First World War," in *Home/Front: The Military, War and Gender in Twentieth-Century Germany*, eds. Karen Hagemann and Stefanie Schüler-Springorum (Oxford, New York: Berg, 2002), p. 70.

the medical staff actively engaged in their work; the bandaged wounded and convalescing casualties; or, in the case of the maimed, the kindness of technology in the form of prosthetics attached to the body. In these pictures, the fragile human body remains imperceptible—even a forearm bone shattered by a grenade blast ceases to be material in its representation via an x-ray image.

Poised for a strongly visceral reception, Ernst Friedrich's album gives insight into the means for handling visual documents that were already taking shape during the war, and into the political dimension of the montage of images, but also into the accompanying reconstructive and reenactment practices. This aspect is in turn well demonstrated by medical documentary films shot during the war, like, for instance, War Neuroses from 1917, filmed at Netley Hospital in England by the physician Major Arthur Hurst with funds from the Medical Research Committee.[74] As related by Edgar Jones, this twenty-seven-minute picture was not intended for general distribution but rather meant as an instructional film for military medical staff, its goal being to convince doctors of the possibility of treating and curing what was then called "shell shock," now referred to as posttraumatic stress disorder.[75]

The First World War is treated as the moment when military psychiatrists identified a new, hitherto-unknown condition in men—that is, male hysteria (*Kriegshysterie*),[76] most

74 See War Neuroses: Netley Hospital *(1917)*, www.youtube.com/watch?v=AL5noVCpVKw, accessed February 4, 2013.

75 See Edgar Jones, "*War Neuroses* and Arthur Hurst. A Pioneering Medical Film about the Treatment of Psychiatric Battle Casualties," *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences*, 67, 3 (2012), pp. 345–73.

76 In this publication, I use the term "hysteria," which exists in German as well as English literature and best conveys the cultural nature of this condition. In this regard I consider a specific chapter of Elaine Showalter's 1985 book to be a pioneering work: Elaine Showalter, "Male Hysteria: W.H.R. Rivers and the Lessons of Shell Shock," in Elaine Showalter, *The Female Malady: Women, Madness and English Culture, 1830–1980* (Middlesex: Harmondsworth, 1987), pp. 167–94. I most often use an expanded form of the term—"war hysteria"—

often labeled as *shell shock* but also known as *war neurosis*, *traumatische Neurose*, and *traumatique de guerre*. This phenomenon, associated with disturbances to basic physical functions (such as walking, sitting, standing), with nervous ticks, uncontrolled trembling of the body, localized paralysis, and with speech impediments, fainting spells, and spasms, is well studied and described in the literature, especially English and German literature.[77] Often stressed is the mass scale of this specific neurosis during the Great War and the tendency for these symptoms to continue to return even long after the war. Emphasis is often placed on the direct relationship between a traumatic experience of wartime violence and the effects that event leaves on the soldier's body and mind. Also evident, however, is the frequency of the illness being regulated by military medicine, which eagerly associated the symptoms of hysteria with a compromised will to continue fighting, with simulation, and with desertion veiled by behavioral theatricalization.

The figure of the hysterical soldier thus became an iconic model in all types of representations of the Great War experience—from literature, through painting and photography, to documentary and fiction films (arising during the war as well as afterwards). Certain scholars even argue that the figure was constructed in texts, and above all in images reproduced by technological means, and it should therefore be analyzed in the spirit

taken from German-language psychiatric, psychopathological, and medical history literature, treating it, in the vein of Julia Barbara Köhne, as the broadest category, covering a range of ailments determined by the medical field of the day which exhibit a specific array of symptoms in varying degrees of intensity. See Julia Barbara Köhne, *Kriegshysteriker. Strategische Bilder und mediale Techniken militärpsychiatrischen Wissens (1914–1920)* (Husum: Matthiesen Verlag, 2009), p. 19.

77 A great number of cultural studies have been dedicated to this issue. I list below only those which had the greatest influence on my reflections. See Paul Lerner, *Hysterical Men: War, Psychiatry, and the Politics of Trauma in Germany, 1890–1930* (London: Ithaca, 2003); Karen Hagemann and Stefanie Schüler-Springorum, eds., *Home/Front: The Military, War and Gender in Twentieth-Century Germany* (Oxford: Berg, 2002).

of Foucault as nothing more than the product of normative practices and discourse.[78] The specific over-representation of hysterical soldiers with their characteristic "quivering bodies" in the postwar reality, not only in art but above all in everyday life—in the family, in the community, and on the street—may confirm the thesis that war hysteria was a fabricated or invented phenomenon. On the other hand it may also undermine the thesis as being overly abstract given the masses of former soldiers authentically suffering the symptoms of posttraumatic stress, whom Magnus Hirschfeld called "living documents of a 'great time'"[79] in his 1926 book *Sittengeschichte des Ersten Weltkrieges*.

The series of examples of "male hysteria" shown in Hurst's film War Neuroses, understood as variations of shell shock, are typically represented visually as severe psychosomatic symptoms such as jitters, cramps, convulsions, muscle stiffness, aphasia, and paralysis. Consistently, however, in each case, these symptoms are cured relatively quickly—in a matter of days or weeks—which allows the soldier to return to "normalcy" and to their "everyday life." We thus see these bodies depicted in the "before and after" convention. At first cognitively and emotionally disintegrated, later casually strolling about, doing farm work, picking fruit, weaving wicker baskets, and finally—now in full uniform and at the ready—setting off to another battle. Such a story is told in the film by a specific, structurally repetitive montage of individual—and seemingly often staged—sequences. Each sequence opens with a text card with the soldier's personal information, such as his age and rank, medical diagnosis and description of the symptoms, followed by a short scene of the physically expressed symptoms. Next comes a card reading "several days/weeks later," and then we see a healthy man, ready to return home or to the

78 See Köhne, *Kriegshysteriker*.

79 Magnus von Hirschfeld and Andreas Gaspar, eds., *Sittengeschichte des Ersten Weltkrieges* (Hanau: Komet, 1995), p. 348.

frontlines. Such a montage obviously excludes the possibility of raising questions, yet it could be said that it itself provokes them: regarding the soldier's actual recovery time, the treatment methods used, the artistic-theatrical inclinations of the director of this medical film, and finally the qualifications of the actors purported to be doctors.

The strongly theatrical aspect comes to the fore in the sequence closing the film, in the story of the convalescent soldiers. We watch a reenactment of the Battle of Seale Hayne, named after the college where the hospital for shell shock patients was located during World War I. Here the hospital's patients are the directors, camera operators, and actors in this film within the film, of which we are informed by the card opening the final sequence: "The Battle of Seale Hayne. Directed, photographed and acted by convalescent war neurosis patients." Without this card, or in the event of its deliberate removal, the fragment could function as an "authentic" document of any battle. We see typical battle scenes: a sprawling terrain whose contours are peppered with constant grenade blasts, after which the soldiers on the field are either fully intact or dead. This internal documentary within the film can be read as yet another sequence of images manipulated by montage or as evidence of the specific possibilities of manipulating the memory of the body. The hospital's shell-shocked patients—put into the extreme position of having to recreate a battle—reenact the moments prior to the event that caused their PTSD. As a result, Hurst's film leaves no doubt that framing (in film shots) a life that had suffered injury can become a strictly political action:

> The frame—as Judith Butler states in *Frames of War*—does not simply exhibit reality, but actively participates in a strategy of containment, selectively producing and enforcing what will count as reality. [...T]he frame is always throwing something away, always keeping something

> out, always de-realizing and de-legitimating alternative versions of reality, discarded negatives of the official version.[80]

Following Butler's logic, it is worthwhile to consider if montage has really—as Didi-Huberman wants it to be—proven to be the key formal approach born out of the experience of World War I. Perhaps it is not (or not only) in the refined art of montage but more in the naïve mimetics of reconstruction that we ought to seek a modern political and artistic strategy. If we take such a viewpoint, the subject of analysis is not only image but also its complex relationship with the body as the site of documenting history. All reconstruction practices recognize the body to be a peculiar archive of events and a medium for "living history," making a topic out of the media documentation of the event, since the immanent trait of reenactment is the "consideration of their own media structure."[81] As argued by contemporary theatre and performance scholars, reenactment practices also manifest a specific attitude to the past: "They re-enact history instead of portraying it, in the here and now, with historical accuracy and faithfulness to the details. They are about both a historical and an animistic approach to history, in which there is a parasitic attitude to images and which treats a performance as a participatory experience."[82]

In the context of reflecting on Great War archives, it is worthwhile to underscore that reconstruction practices constituted an important artistic-political strategy in documentary films shot during the war—repeating practices that have existed since the very beginnings of cinema.[83] During World War I the

80 Butler, *Frames of War*, p. xiii.

81 Jens Roselt and Ulf Otto, "Einleitung," in *Theater als Zeitmaschine. Zur performativen Praxis des Reenactments. Theater- und kulturwissenschaftliche Perspektiven*, eds. Jens Roselt and Ulf Otto (Bielefeld: transcript, 2012), p. 10.

82 Ibid., p. 11.

83 Specifically, this relates to reconstructed newsreels—*actualités reconstituées*—which first appeared documenting the Greco-Turkish War in 1897 and

soldiers were sometimes made to go back onto the battlefields where they had just fought and reenact the battle. In Jean-François Delassus's aforementioned 14–18: The Noise and the Fury, a soldier speaks bluntly of the practice of staging victorious battles for the camera's lens just after the conclusion of the real battle in order to produce sequences that would be ideally suited for film chronicles.

> The year 1914 is the early days of cinema. We, the *les poilus*, were baffled that after each large battle and just after the war, the authorities made us shoot staged reconstructions. It must also be remembered that the cameras weren't shooting just anywhere; they appeared exactly where they were told to be. In spite of this, though, I will use film to tell you about the war. I invite you to step into the skin of a soldier. Witness the decorum in which they live, if you can call it decorum.[84]

This soldier's confession, speaking candidly on the obligation to reenact behaviors preserved in the body[85] just after a physically and psychologically exhausting battle, indicates not only a direct instance of violence done to the soldiers by the enemy but also an iteration of the same violence in the forced repetition of the battle for the camera. Though in the reconstruction the body serves as the direct site of memory and of the representation of the recent event, it is nonetheless the restagings,

the Spanish American War over Cuba in 1898, then the Boxer Rebellion in China in 1900/1901 and the Boer Wars in South Africa from 1899 to 1902. As the earliest example of *actualités reconstituées*, Daniel Gerould names the films of George Méliès, such as War Episodes, Massacre in Crete; Sea Fighting in Greece; A View of the Wreck of the Maine; and Divers at Work on the Wreck of the Maine. See also Daniel Gerould, "Historical Simulation and Popular Entertainment: The Potemkin Mutiny from Reconstructed Newsreel to Black Sea Stunt Men," *TDR*, 33, 2 (1989), p. 168.

84 Cited from Jean-Francois Delassus's 2008 film 14–18: The Noise and the Fury.

85 Compare Richard Schechner's remarks on the definition of performance. Richard Schechner, *Performance Theory* (London: Routledge, 1988) and Richard Schechner, *Performance Studies: An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2002).

which Delassus notes function here as nothing more than a performance for the camera, that affirm the archive model that is so dominant in Western culture and give precedence to lasting visual traces over the impermanent and perishable body. In the end, the bodies of soldiers repeat already performed motions so that they may be recorded onto light-sensitive film, and they do it so that the motions look a certain way on the film (convincing, shocking, engrossing, and so on). In the process, a paradoxical situation emerges: the repeated screenings of the film in turn repeat the traumatic structure of a literal return of past events; these events, the battles, already being a performance, the "original" recording is but a re-do.

Delassus's film makes an important theme of this cultural opposition of body versus archive occurring in mediated reconstruction practices. 14–18: The Noise and the Fury is a chronological reconstruction of World War I battles, created from carefully selected documents that have permanently entered the canon of visual materials from the time of that war—which include staged reconstructions.

Among such materials is Geoffrey Malins and John McDowell's The Battle of the Somme, from 1916. This first British report on the war was widely distributed—starting at the Scala Theatre in London, where it premiered on August 10, 1916, moving to provincial cinemas and finally to frontline cinemas. It proved a tremendous success: in just its first six weeks it was watched by twenty million viewers. Though it showed the brutality and cruelty of the war in a highly realistic manner, its pictures of thousands of wounded and dead soldiers had the paradoxical effect of sending hordes of eager volunteers to the recruitment offices after each screening. The mobilizing effectiveness of the film is one of the reasons that The Battle of the Somme is considered one of the earliest films to serve as ideal material for studying relationships between documentation and propaganda. Another, no less significant reason is because the battle's first offensive, as shown in the film, was

in fact reconstructed specially for the production, which obviously provokes the question about the nature of documentary film (and by extension theatre). To what extent can a documentary film stage reality in the absence or loss of authentic archival sources? Crucially, The Battle of the Somme certainly influenced the way in which World War I was perceived by the public at the time, and indeed throughout the century. To this day, the film remains the source of many iconic images of battles on the Western front, reproduced in books and newspapers as well as in other ostensible documentary films on the Great War,[86] and in fact "whenever the experience of trench warfare and the heroism and suffering of the ordinary soldier need to be evoked."[87] Likewise, in the silent propaganda film Hearts of the World (1918), directed by D. W. Griffith, some of the scenes are real footage from actual battles while others merely reenact the theatre of war. A card at the beginning of the film informs viewers that "D. W. Griffith sets up his camera in the British front line trench at Cambrin, fifty yards from the enemy's lines," though it is not entirely clear what exactly that camera set up in the field actually recorded. Was it only events unfolding live or were there also reenactments? After all, staged sequences would have been necessary to turn a documentary film commissioned by the British government into a resource intended to change the hitherto neutral attitude towards the war among the American public.

The postwar film industry later adopted the reconstruction strategy developed during World War I. By the 1920s,

86 The film functions as something of an archive of material for documentary television films as well, including The Great War (1984, BBC), The Great War and the Shaping of the 20th Century (1996, PBS), and The First World War (2003, Channel 4).

87 Roger Smither, *Memory of the World Register: The Battle of the Somme*, p. 4, www.unesco.org/new/en/communication-and information/flagshipproject-activities/ memory-of-the-world/register/full-list-of-registeredheritage/registered-heritage-page-8/the-battle-of-the-somme/, accessed October 10, 2013.

documentaries shot in the silent film era were being "made real" as the evolution of sound in film made it possible to reproduce the deafening blasts and noise of the battlefield. In this context, a true exception is a silent film made by Léon Poirier (a theatre director prior to the war), titled VERDUN: VISIONS OF HISTORY, released on the tenth anniversary of the conclusion of the war.[88] Showing the senselessness of one of the biggest and bloodiest battles of World War I through the eyes of a former soldier, now pacifist, the film both relies on archival materials (recordings, maps, drawings, handwritten notes—some authentic, some reconstructed) and also restages a series of battle scenes, using actual locations and war veterans.[89] The documents and witnesses—things remaining after World War I and surviving soldiers—are juxtaposed by Poirier with fictional scenes featuring characters typical of a drama (Mother, Son, Intellectual, German Soldier, and so on), often played with theatrical pathos by actors, among them Antonin Artaud. This combination of real and fictional, augmented with a dramatic musical score, endows the documentary film with a new quality of poetic structure and emotional impact.

Functioning somewhat differently was a "series of films made between 1919 and 1927 almost as documentaries, or 'reconstructions as they were billed at that time,'"[90] produced in Great Britain by the studio of Harry Bruce Woolfe in collaboration with the War Office and Admiralty. Bearing the collective title of British Instructional Films, their aim was not so much to portray the brutality and macabre consequences of the war but to create, under the guise of a documentary, a heroic image of soldiers by ennobling the war experience. The translation of war records and archival documents into fictional narratives,

88 In 1931 the director released a sound version of VERDUN, SOUVENIRS D'HISTOIRE.

89 One scene even featured General Pétain playing himself.

90 Ian F. W. Beckett, *The Great War, 1914–1918* (London: Pearson, 2001), p. 457.

mainly handled by screenwriters, produced such classic Hollywood-produced films as What Price Glory (1926) or The Big Parade (1925), the latter being the first ever film attempting to realistically reenact trench warfare. Not without significance to this topic was the 1930 cinematic success All Quiet on the Western Front, which was watched by about 100 million viewers. Undoubtedly, such an enthusiastic reception was due to the fact that director Lewis Milestone's film relied largely "upon already accepted visual myth of the Great War and offered ready-made images constantly recycled ever since."[91]

One such ready-made image to be repeated and reconstructed in 20th-century Great War films was a famous scene depicting the truce between German and British troops occurring during Christmas 1914. This insightful and extraordinary episode of life in the trenches became etched into the memories of many soldiers because the holiday ceasefire was a radical counterpoint to the ever-present images of violence—whether in direct personal experience or conveyed by the media. At the same time, the sight of fraternizing enemy soldiers (which has never been seen since) was so unbelievable that even those involved suspected it to be scripted.[92] One of the soldiers even stated: "If I had seen it on a cinematograph film I should have sworn that it was faked!" Another said: "One had to look again and again to believe what was happening, given everything that had occurred earlier."[93]

Images of the Great War, ever present after its conclusion and constantly recalling the war's experiences of dehumanization, pain, and fear, led not to the dissipation of these feelings

91 Ibid., p. 460.

92 This seemingly unbelievable story of the short truce between enemy soldiers is told in depth on the basis of many earlier unknown documents by Michael Jürgs in the book *Der kleine Frieden im Großen Krieg. Westfront 1914: Als Deutsche, Franzosen und Briten gemeinsam Weihnachten feierten* (Munich: Pantheon Verlag, 2014).

93 Eksteins, *Rites of Spring*, p. 96.

but to an almost compulsive need to relive the trauma—to "look again and again." After the war, particularly characteristic was the repetitiveness of the artistic process, which resulted from artists' fixation on the subject of war and their constant return to the same images and motifs. This was the great challenge of working through the trauma, but it also gave rise to a new performative understanding of art in which repetition and media, emerging in a range of Great War reconstruction practices, became key components of postwar work. Encouraging recurrent consideration of history, these "performances-as-remains" are "situated to psychoanalytic analyses of traumatic repetition, to Althusserian analyses of the ritual tracks of ideology, and to Austinian analyses of enunciation, or citationality: repetitive *act*."[94] Repetition henceforth defined the nature of modern art (especially that with political aspirations), which as a result lost its "aura," its exceptionalness, its distinctiveness and specificity, and rooted itself much more strongly in the processes of creating, utilizing, and critiquing media images of violence.

The Great War as a Source of Political Theatre

Also born as an aesthetic response to the trauma of World War I, modern political theatre likewise relied greatly on the visual memory of violence and death. It was modern in the sense that it evoked reality in a discursive and performative manner, proposing change to that reality in language and through language. Though there had already been a long tradition of theatre dealing with political issues, the term "political theatre" was coined by Erwin Piscator, who in 1929 published *The Political Theatre*, a collection of essays summarizing the most significant phase

94 Rebecca Schneider, "Archives. Performance Remains," *Performance Research* 6, 2 (2001), p. 104. This fragment is taken from the first version of the text "Performance Remains"; it did not make it into the book version.

of his creative work. The volume opens with a demonstrative text, "From Art to Politics," which forms something of a manifesto on the post-World War I spiritual bankruptcy of the author and his generation, and on the related need to change the creative and intellectual paradigm:

> My calendar begins on August 4, 1914.
> From that day the barometer rose:
> 13 million dead;
> 11 million crippled;
> 50 million soldiers who fought;
> 6 billion guns;
> 50 billion cubic meters of gas.
> How does 'personal growth' figure into that? Nobody is going to grow 'personally' there. Something else develops him. The twenty-year-old was confronted by War. Destiny. It made every other teacher superfluous. Summer, Munich, 1914. I was an unpaid trainee at the Hoftheater and was studying philosophy, German and art history at the university.[95]

Piscator is among those artists who, influenced by the experience of the war, carried out a radical reversal in their perception of the role of art in social life and in their own position as an artist: "Up to that time, literature had put life in focus for me, but the war had reversed this relationship: from that time on life put literature into focus."[96] Growing stronger in Piscator's mind was the conviction that the aim is not to put politics into theatre but to practice politics with the use of theatre, which is possible only when art is rooted in a specific political reality and not in literature, which subjects it to metaphorical processes. For Piscator, this direct context was the war: its crimes, violence, social injustice, and utter dehumanization. As he claimed, he turned

95 Erwin Piscator, "From Art to Politics," in Erwin Piscator, *The Political Theatre*, trans. and intro. Hugh Rorrison (London: Methuen Drama, 1980), p. 7.
96 Ibid., p. 16.

from an aesthete into a communist in 1916 while in the Ypres trenches, spurred by an alarming experience: he saw the brain of an army friend splattered on a latrine wall. The Russian Revolution, meanwhile, made him aware of the notion of "activistic, combative, political"[97] art, constituting a sort of theoretical frame that allowed him to clearly articulate the feeling he had already carried inside him prior to the war, earlier expressed in the 1914 poem *War*:

> War! – ? –
> Who says war? An outcast brood of thoughts
> Counts up blast-torn eyes,
> Throats agape with fear,
> Bullet-smashed, blood-mangled guts
> In the pent-up pain of a hundred years,
> A million abjured nights of love!
> War?
> Plead loud: Make war on war![98]

Though Piscator, then a young trainee of the Hoftheater, heeded the emperor's order and joined the ranks of fighting men, rather than identifying with the Germans who enthusiastically welcomed the outbreak of war in 1914, he was ideologically closer to the 300 workers in Neukölln protesting against the war, and closer to the despaired Rosa Luxemburg, who—as Piscator noted in his journal—"had a fit of hysteria when it was announced that the War Loan had been approved by the SPD."[99] The description of revolutionary masses and their female leader as "hysterical" once again brings to mind the figure of the hysterical soldier observed in the media and medical discourses produced during the Great War.

97 Ibid., p. 17.
98 Erwin Piscator, "War" (excerpt), in Piscator, *The Political Theatre*, p. 11.
99 Piscator, "From Art to Politics," p. 12

The issue of identity, rooted in an understanding of gender and class, constitutes another aspect of the study of war hysteria. The English literature on the subject tends to accentuate slightly different characteristics of the hysterical soldier than its German equivalent. In the case of the former, there is a stronger emphasis on class in that male hysteria is often associated with proletarian soldiers and not with commissioned ranks. In the latter, more prevalent is the tendency to correlate the "healthy" German army with the cultural construct of strong masculinity, and conversely the masses of soldiers suffering from hysteria with pathological femininity. While the categories of gender and class are examined from the perspective, so to speak, of one version of modernity that interprets the 19th century as a period that witnessed the advancement of female and proletarian emancipation, the same period was also marked by a subordination and subjugation of these cultural minorities by such means as the discourse on hysteria.[100]

From this perspective the vision of the mass of hysterical World War I soldiers seems to be a logical consequence of the culturally dependent perception of the masses striving for emancipation that dominated Western Europe in the century leading up to the war. The masses, equated with the cultural construct of femininity, were pathologized, as Peter Sloterdijk argues in his *Die Verachtung der Massen* (The Contempt for the Masses), writing that in the early 20th century there was a widespread belief that the masses "can never be encountered except in a state of pseudo-emancipation and half-subjectivity—as a vague, unstable, undifferentiated entity controlled by mimicry and epidemic affections, hence as a feminine-faunic, pre-explosive something."[101] Writing convincingly about the inextricable

100 See Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Random House, 1978).
101 Peter Sloterdijk, *Die Verachtung der Massen: Versuch über Kulturkämpfe in der modernen Gesellschaft,* vol. 1 (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2000), pp. 13–14.

link between the masses and hysteria is Julia Barbara Köhne, who points out that that link was transferred to the "military context of the First World War in a way that hysterical soldiers would not only henceforth bear the mark of the masses but their very presence would be on a mass scale."[102] Moreover, hysterical symptoms in soldiers were perceived, or rather "imagined, as eluding all categorization," which in turn led to limitless possibilities in how the condition was expressed, ultimately blurring the distinctive features of this specific war neurosis.[103]

With his wartime experience and knowledge of the revolution, Piscator laid the foundation for a new sociological take on theatre, later expanded by Bertolt Brecht. Yet in contrast to the author of *Mother Courage*, Piscator espoused above all the virtue of collective and, in a certain sense, "partisan" work, especially considering that his closest friend and creative collaborators—Wieland Herzfelde, John Heartfield, Georg Grosz, and Walter Mehring—joined the ranks of the Communist Party of Germany after the Social Democrats gave permission to slaughter the proletariat and party leaders—Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg—in the streets of Berlin in 1919. It is no wonder then that as he defined the fundamental mission of the new "sociological dramaturgy," the author of *The Political Theatre* called for a redefinition of the function of theatre, which from that point onward was to become an organized "weapon in the class struggle,"[104] invalidating all drama that addressed only personal issues as reactionary at heart. For Piscator, the sociological perspective thus meant a "revision of the bourgeois aesthetic,"[105] and therefore created a need to analyze the conditions leading to the ultimate extinction of the politically unencumbered bourgeoisie:

102 Köhne, *Kriegshysteriker*, p. 38.
103 See ibid., p. 39.
104 Piscator, *The Political Theatre*, p. 21
105 Erwin Piscator, "Protelatarian Theatre," in Piscator, *The Political Theatre*, p. 52.

> The War finally buried bourgeois individualism under a hail of steel and a holocaust of fire. Man, the individual, existing as an isolated being, independent (at least seemingly) of social connections, revolving egocentrically around the concept of the self, in fact lies buried beneath a marble slab inscribed "The Unknown Soldier."[106]

Politics strongly dominated Piscator's theatre—beginning with the Proletarian Theatre (1920–21), through the Central-Theatre (1923–24) and the Volksbühne Berlin (1924–27), to the two independent Piscator-Bühnes (1927–28 and 1929). It was the director's clear political self-identification that led to the development of the new aesthetic paradigm. The decided turn towards politics also meant a turn towards history, or more precisely to a critical analysis of history with the aid of the medium of theatre. Theatre's emancipation from drama and even from all forms of literature led to its radical autonomization, as well as to a deep interest in historical documents, textual and visual alike. The effect of this transformation was the replacement of the playwright with the figure of the dramaturge—the archivist and ideologue who collects cultural texts and animated facts, makes revisions, and decontextualizes and ultimately executes a montage of authentic materials: speeches, articles, press clippings, proclamations, photographs, films, and so on. (Brecht would later call Piscator the best dramaturge.) The dramaturge thus became a unique agent of reconciling engaged art and autonomous art, and of establishing the political duality so essential to the contemporary practice of art, a task that relies on a display of the political character of aesthetics as well as of the aesthetic dimension of politics. In effect, the figure of the dramaturge became theatre's symbol of the changes sweeping the field of modern art, and above all a guarantor of the abandonment of action, linearity, and illusion (and thus of

106 Erwin Piscator, "Foundation and Development of the Piscator-Bühne," in ibid., p. 186.

traditional drama values) in favor of the montage of images and fragments (a practice previously belonging more to film than to theatre).

This act of dismantling the literary structure of the performance was accompanied by a conscious use of film and photography as supplementary tools in the theatre, which becomes especially evident when we consider that John Heartfield was behind the projections in Piscator's most notable productions.[107] Piscator is known to have called the future photomontage artist a true founder of epic theatre, offering as evidence an anecdote from the 1920 production of *Der Krüppel* (The Cripple), when Heartfield, who had made the backdrop for the stage, arrived late to the theatre with the finished drop as the first act was underway. Heartfield burst into the theatre, interrupting the actors onstage and insisting they pause the performance. Piscator stopped the play and, after asking the audience's permission, "dropped the curtain, hung up the backdrop and to everybody's satisfaction started the play anew."[108] The action was interrupted, then repeated with the addition of an added layer of visual imagery. The performance structure organized in this way was in turn to correctly relay the fragmentary perception of a generation that in the trenches had lost the ability to experience and describe reality in the traditional manner.

Piscator was well aware that the Great War was not only a war of arms but also of images. That is why, in one of his most noteworthy productions, Trotz alledem! (In Spite of Everything) from 1925, he made World War I photographs and documentary film footage equal to the written word in building the historical and political narrative.[109] The space in which this multimedia theatre production was held added another layer

107 Heartfield made the projections for *Trotz alledem!* (1925), *Hoppla, wir leben!* (1927), and *Rasputin* (1927).

108 Piscator, "Proletarian Theatre," p. 40.

109 It is worth recalling that La Section photographique de l'armée (SPA) was established in France in 1915, and Das Bild- und Filmamt (Bufa) in Germany

to the production of meaning: the enormous Großes Schauspielhaus, an amphitheatre-like hall with wrap-around seating, allowed the audience to watch not only the action unfolding onstage but also the other spectators and their reactions. Built on a revolving stage, the set was a "terraced structure of irregular shape with a raked platform on one side and steps and levels on the other."[110] The Großes Schauspielhaus space was at once a departure from the picture-frame stage complying with the traditional authority of vision in favor of one relying on a spherical layout, which worked in many senses simultaneously.[111]

In this play, which depicted the era spanning the outbreak of the war, through the Russian Revolution, until the murder of Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg in January 1919, Piscator strove to outline "in instructive senses [...] the whole development of historical materialism."[112] To this end he used—alongside textual documents like speeches, articles and press excerpts, proclamations, political pamphlets, and characters from historical events—authentic visual materials from the Reich archives. All of this came together into a scenario for a political play that was to be understood as an intellectual scheme or model able to be enacted onstage, based on a dialectic "link between events on the stage and the great forces active in history."[113] The archival materials used onstage presented Europe's ruling houses, depicting times of mobilization and demobilization, all the while dramatically revealing the cruelty of war that the millions of the war's victims had personally experienced: "Flamethrower attacks, piles of mutilated bodies,

in 1917. These agencies were responsible for production and distribution of photographs and films.

110 Erwin Piscator, "The Documentary Play," in Piscator, *The Political Theatre*, p. 94

111 On the contrasting nature of these two types of theatre stage, see Etienne Souriau, "The Cube and the Sphere," trans. Claude P. Viens, *Educational Theatre Journal*, 4, 1 (March 1952).

112 Piscator, "The Documentary Play," p. 91.

113 Ibid., p. 93.

burning cities."[114] Piscator quickly understood the extent of the impact these images had on the audience and the effect of the constant confrontation of body and image, action and narration, presence and mediation:

> The drastic effect of using film clips showed beyond any theoretical consideration that they were not only right for presenting political and social mechanisms, that is, from the point of view of content, but also in a higher sense, right from the formal point of view. [...] The momentary surprise when we changed from live scenes to film was very effective. But the dramatic tension that live scene and film clip derived from one another was even stronger. They interacted and built up each other's power, and at intervals the action attained a furioso that I have seldom experienced in theatre. For example, when the Social Democratic vote on War Loans (live) was followed by film showing the first dead, it not only made the political nature of the procedure clear, but also produced a shattering human effect, became art, in fact. What emerged was that the most effective political propaganda lay along the same lines as the highest artistic form.[115]

The above passage well illustrates how Piscator's theatre was a kind of aesthetic meta-narrative on the subject of visual narration of the then-recent war. The director (a former soldier) was aware that the image was the modern medium which, though it made it impossible to become immersed in the experience or, as Benjamin preferred, in the ordeal of the human/soldier, affected the emotions through imagery and evoked feelings in spectators watching the visual representation of the "war experience" and the "soldier's ordeal." This theatrical process was integral to the establishment of a kind of affective political community: "Theatre had become reality, and soon it was not a case of the stage confronting the audience, but one big assembly, one

114 Ibid.
115 Ibid., p. 97.

big battlefield, one massive demonstration."[116] The emotional effect generated through the use of political documents, which Piscator hit upon in *In Spite of Everything*, paved the way for his subsequent plays, in which he eagerly incorporated montages of documentary imagers found in state archives and also began to bring to life onstage materially nonexistent images, thereby creating an alternative archive of the Great War.

An example is the famous "Three Emperors" scene in what was arguably Piscator's most politically important play, *Rasputin, the Romanovs, the War and the People that Rose Against Them*. Produced in 1927 at the Piscator-Bühne, the performance was loosely based on Aleksey Tolstoy and Pavel Shchegolev's play *Rasputin* and, to a much greater extent, on source materials: the recollections of Maurice Paléologue, the French ambassador in Saint Petersburg; documents concerning the outbreak of the war collected by Karl Kautsky; speeches by Lenin; the recollections of Erich Ludendorff; Joseph Stalin's journal; the letters and autobiography of Wilhelm II; and works by Zamka, Lensky, and Thompson on Rasputin.[117] The reinterpretation of Tolstoy and Shchegolev's play and the addition of a series of document-based scenes/images, as had long been Piscator's style, were to serve in this case as a means to transform the fate of the individual (Rasputin) into a "revue of the fate of all of Europe," in order to demonstrate that "each seemingly local event must find its justification in international political and military activity."[118] The scene in question, taking place between Wilhelm II, Tsar Nicholas II, and Franz Joseph of Austria, which was written by Leo Lania exclusively on the basis of historical sources,[119] was intended "to show the most important monarchs as

116 Ibid., pp. 96–97.
117 For a full list of source materials for the play, see Erwin Piscator, *Eine Arbeitsbiographie in 2 Bänden*, vol. 1, ed. Knut Boeser (Berlin: Renata Vatková, 1916).
118 Ibid.
119 See ibid., p. 182.

non-independent tools in the service of their countries' economic interests."[120] They, the unwitting representatives of economic and military powers, are introduced to Vladimir Lenin, a representative of the proletariat, consciously working toward a revolution. The "Three Emperors" scene, depicting the monarchs as essentially witless puppets of the real powers, provoked immediate protest, first from Tsar Nicholas's secret financial advisor, the consul general of Russia, Dmitri Rubinstein, and soon afterwards from Kaiser Wilhelm II, who felt slandered by the play's portrayal of him, which he described in his subsequent legal indictment as similar to Piscator's depiction of the other two rulers: "Franz Joseph as a complete idiot and Tsar Nicholas as a fanatical and personality-less half-wit."[121] The indictment was followed by a trial, which—much like the indictment brought by Rubinstein—ended in a ruling against Piscator.

The courtroom defeat, however, turned into a great success onstage. The theatre at Nollendorfplatz was filled to the brim with spectators for the evening performance.

> When the light projection reading "Petersburg, Berlin, Vienna" appeared on the globe [serving as the set] to announce the scene with the monarchs, some of the spectators rose up to see what was about to happen. Then some of the segments opened up and, like in earlier performances, Tsar Nicholas appeared in one of them, Franz Joseph in the second, and the third was occupied by Leo Lania, who informed the public that the former emperor objected to being portrayed onstage. Then Lania read the main points of the verdict that had been passed that afternoon.[122]

120 See ibid.
121 Ibid., p. 200.
122 Ibid., p. 201.

The public rewarded the performance with exuberant applause, securing Erwin Piscator's position as a master of modern political theatre, in which an effective weapon against the state-imposed historical narrative proved to be the theatrical reconstruction of political events. The understanding of documentary as a performative negotiation between historical truth and fiction lets us see Piscator's theatre as a unique archive of the Great War, and simultaneously as a site for the creation of an alternative version of reality.

Theatre as an Alternative Cultural Archive

Arising from the rubble of the war experience, Erwin Piscator's pacifist and communist convictions, his belief in the revolutionary mission of theatre, his political engagement and interest in the fate of the marginalized, and finally his focus on the voices of local minorities all meant that his theatre became not only an anti-war political tribune but also an unofficial archive of East-Central European culture, including the history of the less obvious and forgotten connections between Polish and German culture. This has little to do with aesthetic influences, like that of Piscator's work on the *Zeittheater* of Leon Schiller. Nor is it about the perception of Piscator's theatre during the two-decade interwar period as, according to Johannes R. Becher, "the only worthwhile attempt carried out in the field of proletariat-revolutionary theatre."[123] It is rather about the traces of the forgotten Polish-German history, as it relates to the involvement of artist/soldiers from eastern Prussian provinces in World War I. Following some of their fates through what I have been able to find in researching the lives of those who had some connection with Piscator, I will attempt to show

123 Johannes R. Becher, "Mieszczańska i proletariacko-rewolucyjna literatura w Niemczech," in *Dźwignia* no. 1 (1927), p. 26.

how Piscator's theatre, founded on the ruins of the Great War, can be read as a kind of document of repressed historical narratives, particularly concerning the relative absence of archival material on World War I in Poland.

The perspective for the study of modern political theatre I propose finds its theoretical justification in biographical materialism and is closely linked to the observations of the authors of *Migracje modernizmu* (The Migrations of Modernism), according to whom all narratives on modernity have, from the very beginning, always arisen in reliance on interference between time and "topographically understood space."[124] Unlike the authors of those excellent studies (Tomasz Majewski, Agnieszka Rejniak-Majewska, and Wiktor Marzec), I concentrate not on the emigration of the European intellectual elite to the United States in the 1930s but rather on the "micro-migrations" of theatre artists taking place just after World War I in the peripheral regions of Europe. I do hope, however, that the stories of the artist-soldiers I recount also demonstrate the fact that only in observing the "uprooting and relocation movement" and its repetitions throughout history can we grasp the historical dynamics of modernity. Continuing down this path it is also possible to find a better understanding, perhaps more significantly, of local "struggles with the modern form" that to this day have an impact on historical narration, art, and politics. As it turns out, the imaginary map of "Polishness" and the always-located-somewhere-else (Polish) modernity do not always correspond with Poland's actual geography.

Looking at it from such a perspective it becomes possible to acknowledge Piscator's World War I-rooted theatre as an archive of the culture of East-Central Europe, and as a symbolic

124 See Tomasz Majewski, Agnieszka Rejniak-Majewska, and Wiktor Marzec, "Migracje intelektualne: paradygmaty teorii i materializm biograficzny," in *Migracje modernizmu. Nowoczesność i uchodźcy*, eds. Tomasz Majewski, Agnieszka Rejniak-Majewska, and Wiktor Marzec (Łódź: Narodowe Centrum Kultury, 2014), p. 8.

site for the articulation of the modern experience, of dislocation, and of the crossing of ethnic, national, and state boundaries that were not yet fully realized in the post-imperial reality.[125] The biographical materialism suggested here as method of analysis is supported by the belief that the memory of the complex fates of Polish and German soldiers (who were in fact Prussian citizens), marginalized in national historiography, can be carried out through reconstructing those experiences—as Ryszard Kaczmarek, author of the excellent book *Polacy w armii kajzera* (Poles in the Kaiser's Army) suggests—by looking at history "through the eyes of an ordinary soldier, sentenced to passively participate in the slaughter of nations."[126] This is an important point of view, as it reveals ethnic as well as class distinctions among the soldiers, distinctions that were apparent in the varied reactions to the outset of war—ranging from enthusiasm among the German bourgeoisie and intelligentsia to fear and a reluctance to mobilize among the working classes and national minorities of the borderlands.

The complexity of Polish-German history in the era of the Great War is uniquely evident in the biographies of artist soldiers of Jewish heritage, those who were born and raised in lands co-inhabited prior to the war by Germans, Jews, and Poles or by German and Polish Jews. Among them are the playwright from Szamocin, Ernst Toller,[127] the Szczecin-born writer Alfred Döblin, and the Leszno-born Rudolf Leonhard, a poet and communist who published some of his pacifist work under the pen name of Robert Lewandowski. All of these artists—German Jews living in Prussian provinces before the war—had connections to

125 See ibid., p. 14.

126 Ryszard Kaczmarek, *Polacy w armii kajzera na frontach pierwszej wojny światowej* (Krakow: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2014), p. 17.

127 Toller writes about his youth in Szamocin, where his maternal great-grandfather was permitted to settle "as the only Jew" by Frederick the Great, in his autobiography. See Ernst Toller, *I Was a German*, trans. Edward Crankshaw (Saint Paul, Minn.: Paragon House, 1934).

"Polishness" of various degrees, and they had different ways of addressing the subject after shedding their German uniforms but before being forced into exile from their homeland for being Jews. These artists were connected not only by their common heritage, their forced geographical and cultural migration, their participation in World War I in the service of the German Kaiser, and their radical pacifism born out of the extreme war experience, but also—to varying degrees—their artistic ties to the theatre of Erwin Piscator. In 1925, at Berlin's Volksbühne, Piscator directed Rudolf Leonhard's *Segel am Horizont*, based on a story found in a Berlin newspaper about a female comrade who took command of sixty sailors on a Russian ship en route from the English port of Talbot to Leningrad.[128] Meanwhile, Ernst Toller's drama *Hoppla, wir leben!* (*Hoppla, We're Alive!*),[129] the story of a revolutionist sentenced to death, then pardoned and released from prison only to land in a psychiatric hospital and soon thereafter in a world torn apart by the insanity of war, inaugurated the first Piscator-Bühne at Nollendorfplatz in 1927. The somewhat autobiographical story—Toller, after all, had two stints in jail for publically expressing his pacifist views, for his involvement in a munitions factory strike during the war, and his contribution to the organization of the general strike in Munich—prophetically exposed the danger of repeating social behavior that those in power might justifiably categorize as violent or insane. Walter Mehring, author of the songs in *Hoppla, We're Alive!*, warned that "Everything is just as it was before the war. (Just before the next war!)."[130] There is no doubt that Toller, having spent more than a year in the trenches at Verdun in 1916,

128 See Rudolf Leonhard, "Segel am Horizont (Towarischtsch). Schauspiel in vier Akten," in Rudolf Leonhard, *Segel am Horizont. Dramen und Hörspiele* (Berlin: Verlag der Nation, 1963), p. 60.

129 Ernst Toller, *Hoppla, We're Alive!*, in Ernst Toller, *Plays One*, trans. Alan Raphael Pearlman (Islington: Oberon Books 2000).

130 Erwin Piscator, "Contradictions in the Theatre—Contradictions in the Times," in Piscator, *The Political Theatre*, p. 167.

Fig. 8: Actor's training for the performance *Hoppla, We're Alive!* Presented at the opening of the Piscator-Bühne am Nollendorfplatz, Berlin, 1927.

and thus having lived through a tremendous psychological ordeal, must have identified the mercilessly repetitive mechanism of violence very early on. In his *Hinkemann*, written in 1921–22 at the stronghold in Niederschönefeld, he comments on his own experiences and his pacifists convictions with bitter irony: "The people, my friend, are a flock of sheep. Pacifist nonsense. No business sense. The people want blood!!! Blood!!! "[131] On May 22, 1939, in New York, where Erwin Piscator was also living in exile, Toller committed suicide.

Seemingly the least obvious are the links between the work of Alfred Döblin and Piscator's theatre, which never produced any of Döblin's plays. Nevertheless, having seen *Fahnen*, a theatrical rendition of an anarchist strike in Chicago, in 1924, Döblin did find the great potential of epic theatre, the political power of

131 Ernst Toller, *Hinkemann*, trans. Peter Wortsman, *The Mercurian,* vol. 6, no. 4 (fall 2007), https://the-mercurian.com/2017/11/16/hinkemann/.

art, and the potential of "dramatic narrative in pictures."[132] This method of constructing epic theatre through a montage of heterogeneous elements later became the foundation for a great 1929 novel, *Berlin Alexanderplatz*, in which Döblin juxtaposes a variety of documents, texts, languages, styles, and discourses to arrive at an unforgiving diagnosis of social and economic life in the Weimar Republic: violence-dependent. Though the word "war" is conspicuously absent, the main plot axis of Frank Biberkopf's story leaves no doubt that Döblin identified the causes of Germany's aesthetic and political chaos in the Great War experience. The fate of the ordinary proletarian man, a former soldier in the Kaiser's army—confined in a prison and a psychiatric clinic, the institutional epitome of modern biopower—is determined by the war machine and its effect on an individual deprived of political influence. After his release from prison, Biberkopf, thought of as good and decent, begins his new life by brutally raping a woman. This opens the door to a series of personal defeats and criminal transgressions that ends with him getting his arm cut off and, like the many war invalids inhabiting Berlin at that time, landing in a psychiatric clinic. Once there, a repressed memory of the war returns: the image of the approaching "aurora of freedom"—the next, and even more merciless war—appears uncanny. Hearing footsteps approaching steadily to the rhythm of drums, Biberkopf ironically sums up his life as an Other existing in a world where man is no more:

> Keep alert, keep alert, for something is happening in the world. The world is not made of sugar. If they drop gas-bombs, I'll have to choke to death; nobody knows why they are dropped, but that's not the point, we had the time to work against it.

132 Piscator is quoting Döblin in Erwin Piscator, "Flags," in Piscator, *The Political Theatre*, p. 75.

> If war comes, and I know why, and they conscript me, and the war started without me, well, then it's my fault, it serves me right. Keep awake, in the strife, we're not alone in life.[133]

Piscator never produced *Berlin Alexanderplatz*;[134] in 1929, the year this story was published, the year of the great global economic crisis, the second Piscator-Bühne closed its doors just after the production of Walter Mehring's *Der Kaufmann von Berlin* (The Merchant of Berlin). Without a permanent venue, Piscator produced Carl Crede's *§218*, which was harshly critical of the abortion ban, and set off on a tour of Germany with the play. Soon afterwards, propelled by the rise of fascist sentiments in his homeland, Piscator would go abroad and begin his years of exile, first in the Soviet Union and then in the United States. *Berlin Alexanderplatz* did finally make it to the stage thanks to the efforts of an heir to Piscator's idea of political theatre, Frank Castorf. In 2005 he first staged the production in a symbol of the fallen communist utopia, the Palast der Republik in Berlin, at the time slated for demolition, followed by a performance on Piscator's old stage at the Volksbühne am Rosa-Luxemburg-Platz. It was also there, in 2010, that Castorf, following in his predecessor's footsteps, staged *The Merchant of Berlin* during the recent global economic crisis and amid the renewed threats of racism and xenophobia in Berlin. Producing that story of Simon Chaim Kaftan, a Jew from the east, at a time when the subject of fascism was returning to public debate with unexpected vehemence, and following the success of Thilo Sarrazin's *Deutschland schafft sich ab. Wie wir unser Land aufs Spiel setzen*,[135] Castorf exposed the deep connections between

133 Alfred Döblin, *Berlin Alexanderplatz: The Story of Franz Biberkopf*, trans. Eugène Jolas (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1982), pp. 477–78.
134 The story was rather quickly adapted into a film in 1931, directed by the leftist artist Piel Jutzi.
135 Thilo Sarrazin, *Deutschland schafft sich ab: Wie wir unser Land aufs Spiel setzen* (Munich: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 2010).

fascism and capitalism as well as the terrifying historical continuum of German nationalism that surfaced with World War I and persists in modern theories on race and imperialism. This extraordinary production by Castorf, though discounted by critics and much of the public, may—for that very reason—be treated as a unique archive of the resurfacing fears and phantasms, deeply rooted in history, of contemporary Germans.[136]

When the play opens, the audience is confronted with a train compartment, chiseled out of the enormous, empty stage by the lighting, carrying Jews from the east as they flee the pogroms en route to Berlin. Though their bodies are crammed into the small space, the tightly packed passengers are not bothered by their confinement—they are instead exuberant with the energy of the future, with their faith in the new, persecution-free life because, as one of them states, "Nothing will happen in Berlin." The deeply expressive scene, constructed around a musical score to which the actors, in a mix of Yiddish and German, form a chorus voicing the issues related to assimilation, rising to their feet and falling back into their wooden seats in wonderfully choreographed routine, is suddenly interrupted by a figure hitherto unseen in the compartment. A man in a beige suit looking out of the window addresses the other passengers in perfect German, first convincing them of Berliners' hospitality and openness to all newcomers, after which, not able to find ample room in the crowded compartment—because it's "too tight" for him everywhere—he steps out uttering the words "It does smell funny in here, though." In that moment, the story materializes on the stage in the "here and now," coming to life as a necroperformance. The Volksbühne, meanwhile, a theatre located in former East Berlin and endowed—by Frank Castorf—with an awareness of its geopolitical identity, becomes a sort of necropolis/archive in which the history of East-Central Europe is reconstructed, not for the sake of critically referencing the

136 I write more on this in *Pod okupacją mediów*.

Fig. 9: Bülowplatz in the Scheunenviertel, Berlin, in the background: the Volksbühne, in the foreground: the poultry market, 1924.
Fig. 10: Assembly of the KPD in front of the Volksbühne, Bülowplatz, Berlin, January 1925.

past but rather to demonstrate a moment of history repeating itself through a political gesture.

In the scene described here, the Volksbühne, as a theatre and at the same time a living archive, is transported back to the time and place of its nascency—the poor old district of the Scheunenviertel, inhabited by working-class masses and Polish and Galician Jews. It was in this area that Alfred Döblin worked as a physician to the proletariat after returning from the war, where he had worked at a military hospital in Saargemünd. It was also in the Scheunenviertel that he was personally confronted with his own Jewish heritage after a pogrom of thousands of unemployed Jews in November 1929. Soon after, influenced by the idea of solidarity with the *Ostjuden*, the Eastern European Jews, Döblin gave public speeches promoting the autonomization and differentiation of the *Ostjuden*, who in the anti-Semitic German vernacular were also called *Polacken* (as opposed to the assimilated *Westjuden*, who were called *Jeckes*). In 1925 Döblin traveled to Poland to learn about the country of his father's origin, the outcome of which was a collection of reports titled *Journey to Poland*. In it he painted insightful portraits of Polish society in cities of mixed religious, ethnic, political, and class makeup, including Warsaw, Vilnius, Lublin, Lviv, Drohobych, Krakow, Zakopane, and Łódź. The distanced perspective of an outsider observer/anthropologist generated a very worrisome picture of Eastern European Jews, characterized by a nationalism greatly compromised—in Döblin's opinion—by the experience of World War I. The German writer's fear of the mania of grandeur, hatred, and ignorance in the teaching of history, and of the unconditional nationalistic patriotism that he observed in Poland is interpreted in an interesting way by Henryk Grynberg, who writes that Döblin was well aware that

> to assimilate Ukrainians, Belarusians, Lithuanians, Jews and Germans is not possible in Poland [...] because assimilation [...] demands goodwill from both sides (as proven by the lamentable effects of Jew-

> ish assimilation in Poland after the Second World War). He was terrified by the "tyranny of the national," both among Poles and the minorities. He saw how they "isolated themselves, psychologically boiling over…becoming increasingly vehement […] and over-reactive" and he foresaw "a thousand misfortunes" which might occur in those years so close to the Holocaust and the Polish-Ukrainian slaughter.[137]

At the same time Döblin repeatedly voiced his sense of otherness as he visited Jewish neighborhoods. He was concerned with the deep economic stratification (in fact, affecting Poland as a whole), constantly asking "Who goes hungry in this country and who is sated?"[138] But above all he was terrified by the ever-present signs of a "Jewish Middle Ages in Eastern Europe." His visit to a cemetery on the eve of the Jewish Day of Atonement, where he encountered throngs of beggars, blind people, deaf-mutes, and wailing women clutching gravestones, was very cathartic and he was overtaken with extreme emotion:

> Cold shivers run up and down my spine when I see and hear these things. I ride back on the trolley, climb the hotel stairs, sit in my room; it takes me a while to collect my thoughts. This is something horrible. It is something primordial, atavistic. Does this have anything to do with Judaism? These are living vestiges of ancient notions! These are vestiges of a fear of the dead, the fear of wandering souls. A feeling handed down to the members of this nation with their religion. It is the remnant of a different religion, animism, a cult of the dead.[139]

Döblin realizes that the history of the Eastern European Jew, their distinct dress, language, religion, and customs, is absolutely fundamental to their identity and their "ancient national

137 Henryk Grynberg, "Posłowie" (Afterword) in Alfred Döblin, *Podróż po Polsce* (Krakow: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2000), pp. 314–15.
138 Alfred Döblin, *Journey to Poland*, trans. Joachim Neugroschel (London, New York: I. B. Tauris & Co., 1991), p. 31.
139 Ibid., p. 66.

feeling and national consciousness."[140] This tradition of the Jewish nation is completely alien to Western Europeans ("People who know only Western Europe fail to realize this").[141] Taking part in the age-old rituals evoked in Döblin fear and alienation, but it also allowed him to grasp that the Jewish people as an active cultural community still existed. This fundamental identity, found deep down, proves to be temporary, however. On the train heading to the last station before Berlin, which would have been Gdańsk ("a strange sovereign hybrid"[142]), the German Döblin experienced a dual sense of otherness, as a Jew and as a German. As he returned home, a young man in his compartment was reading national-democratic newspapers. Their conversation began with a comment by the young man who, as will soon become apparent, is a former soldier of the Great War and who originated from the Prussian partition and fought initially on the side of the Central Powers and later with the Allies: "You won't win any popularity contest if you speak German in Poland."[143] These words kicked off a great tirade of hate towards the Germans, making the presumptuous young man feel better as a Pole: "They gave us the name 'Slavs' from 'slaves.' But now they realized they made a mistake." This arrogance towards the other nation led him consequently to express pure racism against the Jews, which Döblin had to listen to:

> They're not individual persons in Poland. They're a nation, a people. They own large areas of the cities. They were allowed into Poland. And what do they live off now? Here and everywhere else? They live off the defective development of people. They won't allow my people to climb any higher; otherwise the Jews would perish. If a nation is poorly developed, they prevent it from recovering. And our nation is poorly

140 Ibid., p. 50.
141 Ibid.
142 Ibid., p. 261.
143 Ibid., p. 256.

> developed. You must have observed how much commerce is in their hands. How wealthy they grow, with our wealth. They're nothing but saprophytes, mushrooms growing from putrescence, fungus living on decaying matter, parasites. They're a race of bacteria.[144]

These convictions, voiced by this Polish patriot in "good German without an accent,"[145] were by no means evidence of 19th-century prejudices but rather a manifestation of the modern form of racism that in the 1920s captivated the minds of the German masses. This ideology which, as Wilhelm Reich aptly argued already in 1933, was to be an effective means of combatting Marxism, relied on the conservative nature of its followers while also implementing "nationalistic imperialism with methods he [Hitler] has borrowed from Marxism, including its technique of mass organization."[146] The ideology kept its purely reactionary character hidden from its main political backers, who were middle-class bureaucrats, mid-level merchants, and above all peasants migrating to the cities.

Pro-revolution artists like Piscator continued to voice their pacifist views as a countermeasure to the spread of Nazism, identifying in the nationalist-imperialist movement the threat of another war. Perhaps this is why Piscator's theatre became a place for the expression of enigmatic, migrating identities that could not be associated with a single country or a single people. Erwin Piscator's 1929 *The Political Theatre* can thus be read as an attempt to work through the collective trauma that was the burden of an entire generation of World War I soldiers, and as an attempt to formulate an antidote to the growing fascist sentiments and the progressive militarization of Germany. Looking back at the experience of the war was a return to a world in

144 Ibid., pp. 257–58.
145 Ibid., p. 256.
146 Wilhelm Reich, *The Mass Psychology of Fascism*, trans. Mary Boyd Higgins (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1980), p. 40.

which a radical conception of nation had already been formulated but had not yet fully actualized. After all, the Kaiser's army consisted of Germans as well as German Jews from the east and Poles from the Prussian provinces. Their time together in the trenches often led to a growing awareness that an abstract understanding of nation could never be realized and—particularly when it came to soldiers from artistic and intellectual backgrounds—to the rise of pacifism.

"I met the war as an 'ordeal,' you cannot hoodwink me. [...] My friends and I survived the war, and the ordeal of war showed me the way to the front of life, to the front of peace: to an unconditional fight for life and against war."[147] These are the words of Rudolf Leonhard in his 1936 article "Wir Kriegsdichter," in which he returns to the origins of his political beliefs. After serving as a soldier in the Kaiser's army, stationed in the Mazury region during the winter of 1914/15, and then hospitalized at a lazaretto in Insterburg for severe frostbite, heavy damage to his nose, and a concussion, Leonhard wrote the play *Die Vorhölle* (Limbo) in 1916. Much like his poems, the play was an expression of extreme disillusionment with the war, for which he volunteered in 1914. The drama was banned for its pacifist message and suppressed until 1919, when it was staged by the Berlin theatre Die Tribüne, which the poet had founded with Karl-Heinz Martin. It's no wonder the work was found objectionable—the titular limbo is here a closed space resembling a military hospital and jail in one, interpretable as an institution of biopower:

> A narrow stage holds a soldier's cot set at an angle which suggests that a row of identical cots with other wounded men stretches to the left and to the right. At the back is a table with bandages and medical sup-

147 Rudolf Leonhard, "Wir Kriegsdichter," in *Die neue Weltbühne*, 45 (1936), p. 1419.

> plies, around which a doctor and a guard hover. The space is modest, not very clean, poorly lit, cold.[148]

The protagonist of the play, which is set in a modern laboratory of knowledge-power, is a wounded soldier with an amputated leg who becomes a wartime everyman. He doesn't even have a name; he's simply called Soldier. Shown in the static image of a bedridden, bandaged man-puppet, he receives continuous doses of morphine and talks about his sense of self, shaped by the experience of his own body, of which "only tatters"[149] now remain. At the same time, he defines himself as an Other, saying that a casualty is neither a soldier nor a man since "a German soldier does not feel pain"[150] and a man has "intact skin which sheathes his beautiful body."[151]

There is no doubt that from the pacifist perspective the physical extremes of the Great War—regardless of ethnic, national, and class differences—were a deeply communal experience; the pain, suffering, and death were a "community-forming" common ground. This was emphatically expressed years later by Erich Maria Remarque in *All Quiet on the Western Front:*

> On the next floor below are the abdominal and spine cases, head wounds and double amputations. On the right side of the wing are the jaw wounds, gas cases, nose, ear, and neck wounds. On the left the blind and the lung wounds, pelvis wounds, wounds in the joints, wounds in the kidneys, wounds in the testicles, wounds in the intestines [...] Two fellows die of tetanus. Their skin turns pale, their limbs stiffen, at last only their eyes live—stubbornly [...] I see intestine wounds that are constantly full of excreta. The surgeon's clerk shows

148 Rudolf Leonhard, "Die Vorhölle," unpublished manuscript from the collection of the archive of the Akademie der Künste in Berlin, folder titled: Maximilian-Scheer-Archiv, 1313, p. 5.
149 Ibid., p. 6.
150 Ibid., p. 35.
151 Ibid., p. 32.

> me X-ray photographs of completely smashed hipbones, knees, and shoulders. A man cannot realize that above such shattered bodies there are still human faces in which life goes its daily round. And this is only one hospital, one single station; there are hundreds of thousands in Germany, hundreds of thousands in France, hundreds of thousands in Russia. How senseless is everything that can ever be written, done, or thought [...][152]

But in this hospital, it must be remembered, soldiers from the Kaiser's army lend help to a 40-year-old brother-in-arms, the Polish man Johann Lewandowski, a bullet-riddled cripple and former carpenter, by bringing his wife to the hospital so the soldier can—perhaps for the last time—make love to her. The intimacy between the soldier and his wife is observed by the Germans with tenderness and excitement while the protagonist sees—in this moment of "naked life" conditioned by the war—the potential to renew human bonds: "We now feel ourselves like one big family, the woman is happy, and Lewandowski lies there sweating and beaming."[153]

Surely influenced by his lazaretto experience, Rudolf Leonhard, the author of the 1925 collection of poems *Das nackte Leben* (The Naked Life), had already formulated his own pacifist view by 1916: "A consequence of one's own sense of nationality is the acknowledgement of the existence of other nations, and this entails a simple application—to make that final step to realizing the multitude of their riches, and as a result to love other nations, to love the whole world."[154] The poet from Leszno published this statement in the afterword to the 1918 volume *Polnische Gedichte* (Polish Poems), an extraordinary piece of evidence of the relations between Germans and Poles in the Prus-

152 Erich Maria Remarque, *All Quiet on the Western Front*, trans. A.W. Wheen Fawcett Crest (New York: Ballantine Books, 1987), p. 263.
153 Ibid., p. 267.
154 Rudolf Leonhard, "Nachwort," in Rudolf Leonhard, *Polnische Gedichte* (Leipzig: Kurt Wolff Verlag, 1918), p. 35.

sian army. It is also a wealth of knowledge on the ethical problems faced by Polish soldiers fighting in enemy armies. The recognition that Poles scattered in the partitioning countries' various armies as a result of the global armed conflict were forced to kill their own countrymen led Leonhard to proclaim the Polish issue to be an issue of all peace-inclined Europeans, including German citizens.

> Wenn in Polen die Schranken
> Fallen, wenn den Polen Freiheit
> Gegnadet würde—wir haben nicht einmal zu danken,
> Es ist die Zeit, es ist die Pflicht. Nicht uns—Ihr seid
> Es selbst, und schuldet Euch: Gerechtigkeit![155]

Without a doubt, poetry was one of the art forms most often used to express opposition to violence and nationalism during the war and—thanks it its succinctness and ease of transport—it was the best way for pacifist soldier-artists to give voice to their beliefs. Piscator, who after the war strongly disassociated himself from expressionism on account of its excessive concern with the individual, wrote in one of his war accounts that highly influential to the development of his aesthetic and political views was his regular reading in the trenches of the expressionist magazine *Die Aktion*, which reached the soldiers of the Kaiser's army through the efforts of its editor-in-chief and publisher, the pacifist Franz Pfemfert.

> When I discovered the title "Die Aktion," when I saw poem after poem describing my suffering, my fear, my life and my likely death, [...] it became clear to me that we are not governed by the will of God, that

155 Rudolf Leonhard, "Lied der Polen an Europa," in Leonhard, *Polnische Gedichte*, p. 7: "The borders in Poland fall, / When the grace of freedom rains down on Poland, / We shall thank no one. / The time has come. This is a common responsibility. / Not for us—for yourselves, for you / You owe it to yourselves: Justice!"

> it was not some cursed, irreversible fate that pushed us into this shit but rather what led to all this was a violation of mankind and of men. I credit that recognition to Pfemfert and his "Die Aktion."[156]

The column "Gedichte vom Schlacht-Feld" (Poems from the Battlefield)—the content referred to in the above quote—was also of interest to Witold Hulewicz, who served in the same army as Piscator. This soldier from a family of Greater Poland bourgeoisie, a future poet and translator of Rilke,[157] was drafted into the German army in 1914 at age 19 and served until the outbreak of the German revolution in 1918. During the war he sent his accounts of life on the front in letters to his mother Helena, who had them published in local Polish newspapers such as *Dziennik Poznański*, and *Kurier Poznański*.[158] At the same time he maintained regular epistolary contact with his brother Jerzy Hulewicz, who did not join the war effort and remained behind at the family estate in Kościanki, from 1916 working on publishing the Polish expressionist magazine *Zdrój* with Stanisław Przybyszewski. The first issue appeared in the fall of 1917, with Witold Hulewicz's first contribution appearing under the pen-name "Olwid" in March 1918, in the form of review of Bernhard

156 Paul Raabe and Walter Verlag, eds., *Aufzeichnungen und Erinnerungen der Zeitgenossen* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Olten, 1965), p. 192.

157 Irena Bartoszewska writes more on the subject of Hulewicz as a translator of German literature—including Goethe, Rilke, and Mann. See Irena Bartoszewska, *Witold Hulewicz. Tłumacz i propagator literatury niemieckiej w Polsce* (Łódź: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, 1995). Hulewicz himself authored an interesting article on his literary translation method: Witold Hulewicz, *Polski "Faust". Rzecz o nowych przekładach, o sposobach tłumaczenia i o polemice dookólnej* (Warsaw: Dom Książki Polskiej, 1926).

158 All facts concerning Witold Hulewicz's life are cited from Agnieszką Karaś. See Agnieszka Karaś, *Der Pole, der auch Deutscher war. Das geteilte Leben des Witold Hulewicz* (Warsaw: Pod Wiatr, Osnabrück: Fibre Verlag, 2004), p. 15. The author also directed the documentary film Inny—Życie Witolda Hulewicza, written by Agnieszka Karaś and Romuald Karaś; cinematography, Kai von Westermann. Cast: Vladen Stamenkovic (Witold Hulewicz), Janusz B. Roszkowski (Rainer Maria Rilke). Oficyna Literatów i Dziennikarzy Pod Wiatr, Westermann Filmproduktion, Germany/Poland, 2002.

Kellermann's book *Der Krieg im Westen* (The War in the West).[159] Soon afterwards he began publishing in *Zdrój* translations of poems from the front printed in *Die Aktion*, followed by his own poetry, which was compiled in 1921 in a volume titled *Płomień w garści* (A Flame in the Hand). In these poems, written in an expressionist, lyric tone and with an anti-war message, the radical experience of the body on the frontlines played a key role in the formation of his new voice for describing the war's extreme psychological pressure, as in *Szepty* (Whispers):

> He liked the nights.—
> Lilac nights, pulsing with the breath of twelve poor chests.
> Each day brings torment harsher that the last. The burning
> Stomach wound nothing but a distraction and a welcome change.
> When the thud of galloping blood settled in the wound, the brain's
> Hitherto still ganglia began to move and turn
> Into the most hideous reptiles.
> And from their midst, the most repulsive amphibian
> Quietly hissed:
> Mur—der—er....
> That hissing whisper would not abate, returned hundreds of times,
> Thousands. A torrent of thoughts wound around the repulsive word
> Like a cackling wreath:
> First thought: a shrill voice and the Prussian blue of filthy eyes,
> A pair of epaulettes glistens—
> Second: eye—rifle sights—a human head and chest above the ditch—
> Third: the finger shudders—trembles—the finger wails: no,
> N o !!!—so young and so unwise is that human head
> above the ditch—
> Another thought: the rifle sprays and smashes a cheek—the unwise head is

159 The book, bearing the subtitle *Kriegsberichte* (Reports from the War), was published by the S. Fischer publishing house, which specialized in literature from the front.

No longer above the ditch.—
Mur—der—er....
Later, violets embrace the room. On the floor below a hoarse gramophone
crackles.
The reptile hisses, hisses,
Til the gramophone falls silent and the violet air mingles with the breath
Of twelve poor chests.
Then even the reptiles coil into a ball and huddle in the corner.
That is why he liked the nights.[160]

The lyric verse, which Hulewicz composed at the Somme, differs dramatically from the poems written during the war by soldiers of the Polish Legions, an independent formation of Austro-Hungarian Army established by Józef Piłsudski in August 1914. First of all it was published only once, in 1921 by the Hulewicz family—unlike the anthology of Polish legionnaires' poems, which was reprinted regularly during the war and afterwards.[161] Also Hulewicz's writings function in completely different aesthetic and political frames. Their clear point of reference is the kind of material/bodily experience of the World War I soldier that is discussed in the first part of this chapter. Legionnaires' poems, by contrast, were rooted in the 19th-century ideal of rising up for national liberation, not the fragility and uncertainty of life in the trenches or the moral dilemmas faced by soldiers. Legionnaires poems remained in

160 Olwid, "Płomień w garści," in *Zdrój* (Poznań, 1921), pp. 12–13.
161 E.g. Stanisław Łempicki and Adam Fischer, eds., *Polska pieśń wojenna: antologia poezyi polskiej z roku wielkiej wojny* (Lviv: Księgarnia Polska Bernarda Połonieckiego, 1916); *Jak to na wojence ładnie: pieśni żołnierskie i legionowe 1914–1919*, comp. Franciszek Barański (Lviv: Księgarnia Polska,1920). The publication of legionnaires' poetry resumed after 1989; see *A gdy na wojenkę szli Ojczyźnie służyć ...: pieśni i piosenki żołnierskie z lat 1914–1918: antologia*, comp. and intro. Adam Roliński (Krakow: Księgarnia Akademicka, 1996).

the sphere of influence left by the tradition of Tyrtaean Romanticism and by the work of soldier-poets in the Polish Legions in Italy,[162] lauded by Adam Mickiewicz in his lectures on Slavic literature at the Collège de France in Paris.[163]

Therefore it is no wonder that the poems of Witold Hulewicz's peers—such as Józef Mączka, Edward Słoński, and Józef Andrzej Teslar[164]—were not the result of a quest for new forms of expression. On the contrary, they reproduced old and easily adapted templates of soldiers' poetry, which—often converted into song—aimed to ennoble the dignity of the legionnaire as a champion of Poland's patriotic and insurrectionist tradition, and, employing techniques of persuasion, aimed to spur the nation to join in the fight for the country's independence:

> Rise my Poland!
> Take action!
> Go with gusto into the mad battle!
> The fuse of underground mines is lit—
> Bells ring out the bloody hour—
> The broken trammels—take action![165]

Whereas this famous poem and others by Józef Mączka not only served as an important reference point in interwar Poland

162 Among the most noteworthy poets were Józef Wybicki (author of *Pieśń Legionów Polskich we Włoszech*), Cyprian Godebski (*Wiersz do Legionów Polskich*), Wincenty Reklewski (*Pieśń o żołnierzu tułaczu*, intro.), and Tomasz K. Tymowski (*Dumania żołnierza polskiego …*).

163 Adam Mickiewicz, *Literatura słowiańska*, w: *Dzieła*, vol. XVIII–XI, ed. Zbigniew Jerzy Nowak, Zofia Stefanowska, Maria Prussak, and Czesław Zgorzelski (Warsaw: Świat Książki, 1998). See in particular lecture 26 of course II.

164 Among the most noteworthy volumes of legionnaires poetry are: *Starym szlakiem Józefa Mączki* (Krakow: Centralne Biuro Wydawnictw NKN, 1917), *Idzie żołnierz borem, lasem … 1914–1915. Wiersze i zapiski Edwarda Słońskiego o Polsce, o wojnie, i o żołnierzach* (Warsaw: Nowina, 1916), and Józef Andrzej Teslar, *Rytmy wojenne 1914–1916* (1916).

165 Józef Mączka, "Wstań Polsko moja!," in *Starym szlakiem: poezje* (Krakow: Centralne Biuro Wydawnictw NKN, 1917), pp. 12–13.

but also returned with all of their ideological force in the rhetoric of contemporary right-wing groups, especially during Polish Independence Day celebrations,[166] the poetry of Witold Hulewicz constitutes a rarely mentioned trace of the experience of World War I soldiers in Polish collective memory.

It is my belief that a major reason for this is Witold Hulewicz's image as a soldier of the Kaiser's army, in stark opposition to that of the soldier in the Polish Legions. Soldiers like Hulewicz, Polish men in German uniforms, were not visually represented, whereas there were countless reproductions of images of legionnaires, just as their poetry was constantly reproduced throughout the war. Even more sympathy was garnered for legionnaires through the proliferation of legion-themed paintings during the interwar period. The contrast was well illustrated in two traveling war exhibitions, organized concurrently in 1916/17: the Polish Legions Exhibition put on by artists fighting in the legions; and the Deutsche Kriegsausstellung, organized by the Prussian Ministry of War with the central committee of the German chapters of the Red Cross.[167]

The Deutsche Kriegsausstellung was above all based on the idea of presenting the material culture of war—from war spoils (weaponry, uniforms, enemy military vehicles); to medical instruments and sanitation services; to mementos, documents, photographs, postcards; and war-themed art and films. This exhibition, which intended to show the "total picture of

166 The internet has proven to be an exceptional channel for the consumption of legionnaires poetry. See, e.g., teachers' lesson plans and a script for a school assembly in celebration of Polish Independence Day: www.spgoraj.pl/pliki/dzialy/publikacje/dzienniepodleglosci.pdf; www.edukacja.edux.pl/p-17210-wstan-polsko-mojascenariusz-apelu.php. See also a Law and Justice party rally in Krakow, November 11, 2008: www.youtube.com/watch?v=XyqoXN_ut4E, accessed June 8, 2015.

167 The Deutsche Kriegsausstellung comprised five individual exhibitions, presented in nearly 30 cities of the German Reich in 1916–1917, including Wrocław (June 1916) and Gdańsk (September–October 1916). See Christine Beil, *Der ausgestellte Krieg. Präsentationen des Ersten Weltkriegs 1914–1939* (Tübingen: Tübinger Vereinigung für Volkskunde, 2004), p. 161.

war"[168] via more than one thousand objects displayed in event halls, exhibition spaces, and city squares, was patterned after large 19th-century national and global exhibitions that served to represent bourgeoisie and capitalist society.[169] Its precise selection, detailed descriptions, meticulous classification, and orderly display of the war objects generated a sense of being surrounded by consumer items while also, as pointed out by a journalist from the *Berliner Tagesblatt*, presenting "a lexicon of the history and technology of war translated into the language of objects."[170] Of course, the narrative was presented from the perspective of—as was still generally believed by the Germans—the future victors of the current war: it showed the modernity of Reich technology while downplaying the achievements of enemy powers, relying on national stereotypes in the process. The exhibition combined education and propaganda with entertainment, which was provided in a supplementary program: military concerts, lectures, film screenings, theatre performances, and tours of replica trenches constructed especially for the event. This last attraction had in fact already become popular before the exhibition. In late 1914/early 1915, green spaces in many German cities offered citizens a chance to enjoy war-themed reconstructions: trenches were dug to transport the public to a warlike environment and give them a physical experience akin to that of the fighting soldier's.

This ideological exhibition, aiming to militarize the mindset of German society, quickly elicited countermeasures from grass-roots German pacifist circles. In 1923 Ernst Friedrich opened the world's first Anti-War Museum (Anti-Kriegsmuseum) at 29 Parochialstrasse in Berlin[171] with an exhibition

168 *Deutsche Kriegsaustellung*, exh. cat. (Leipzig, 1916), p. 17. The term in question appears as "Gesamtbild des Krieges."
169 See Beil, *Der ausgestellte Krieg*, pp. 162, 163.
170 Cited from ibid., p. 164.
171 The first location was at 29 Parochialstrasse. In 1933, after the museum was closed down, the Nazis converted the building to an SA Sturmlokal and it

that combined photography depicting the horrors of war and those responsible for it—including the Kaiser, Marshal Hindenburg, and their subordinate officers—with a presentation of the methods used to militarize society, including children. The selected items were displayed to evoke extreme emotions in the viewers—to provoke shock and terror, but also disdainful laughter by demonstrating the ironies of war, expressed most effectively by showing war objects deprived of their intended function and transformed into items of everyday "peacetime" use, such as a helmet that was repurposed as a flowerpot.

From 1916 to 1928, four anti-war exhibitions were also organized in Berlin by the communist group Der Rote Frontkämpferbund. The last of these exhibitions was held in the Karl-Liebknecht-Haus neighboring the Volksbühne, the headquarters of the German Communist Party, also housing the editorial staff of *Die Rote Fahne* and the studio of John Heartfield. This exhibition, however, was of a different nature than the one by the anti-violence activist Friedrich. The red fighters, though rejecting the war as a product of capitalism and imperialism, integrated its members through their common experiences in the war, expressed in the quasi-military uniforms its members wore during assemblies and in the military rituals they performed. Their answer to the war was not pacifism but rather social revolution.[172]

Emerging from diametrically different political circumstances was the Polish Legions Exhibition, governed by entirely dissimilar strategies for constructing a picture of its armies and

thus become one of the most notorious torture facilities. The modern-day anti-war museum, run by the grandson of Ernst Friedrich, Tommy Spree, is located in the former blue-collar district of Wedding, at 21 Brüsselerstrasse. Housed in a humble tenement building on Parochialstrasse, the museum was seen by Friedrich as a polar opposite to the Zeughaus, a war museum on the elegant street Unter den Linden, which served to "preserve the old capitalistic-military notion of statehood," today the home of the German Historical Museum. Ernst Friedrich, *Anti-Kriegsmuseum* (Berlin: Eigenverlag, 1925), p. 3.

172 See Beil, *Der ausgestellte Krieg*, p. 261.

of the enemy. Among the organizers was Józef Andrzej Teslar, who strove to incite Poles before battle, not only through poetry that was easily adapted into soldiers' songs but also as a coeditor of the *Polish Legions Exhibition Catalogue* in Warsaw and author of the foreword in the Lublin edition.[173] The exhibition and Teslar's introduction alike bore the exalted tone and rhetoric of national liberation, which ignored the millions of casualties suffered in the global conflagration, especially in the year of the exhibition's opening:

> Amid the war cries of giants raving throughout Europe there finally resounded the bold, profound voice of a nation silenced for ages—a voice of freedom. [...] Above the ruins and cinders, above the puddles of blood and forests of crosses there rises the sun of freedom, awaited for ages.
>
> The old eagles of the Napoleonic Legions rub their eyes as they observe the swarthy faces of grey legionnaires in the dust of all those battles and aglow with the rays of this sun. At the sound of gunshots at Mołotkowo, Krzywopłoty and Laski rise the fallen of yore at Racławice, Raszyn, Grochów and Ostrołęka. Kozietulski's triumphal shouts at Somosierra are answered with a rabid "Hurrah!" from the uhlans of Wąsowicz's squadron at Rokita charging the four-deep Moscow trenches.[174]

The creation of the Polish Legions' iconography involved many artists who also showed their work prior to the outbreak of World War I at the 1913 edition of the Salon, an annual exhibition taking place in Warsaw's Zachęta Society of the Encouragement of Fine Arts. Among them were Julian Fałat, Stanisław Jaworski, Stanisław Lentz, Jan Rembowski, Wojciech Kossak,

173 See the *Catalogue of the Polish Legions Exhibition: Warsaw—April 1917*, eds. Jan Śliwiński-Effenberger and Józef Andrzej Teslar (Warsaw: Towarzystwo Zachęty Sztuk Pięknych w Warszawie, 1917) and the *Katalog Wystawy Legionów Polskich: Warszawa – kwiecień 1917.*

174 *Katalog Wystawy Legionów Polskich: Warszawa – kwiecień 1917*, p. 5.

and Stanisław Bagieński. Though both exhibitions featured the same artists, their political and aesthetic context appeared to be completely different. The soldiers' portraits and battle scenes shown at the Legions Exhibition did depict 20th-century uniform styles and modern weaponry, but their composition and the resulting historical narratives were deeply rooted in patterns from the past. These highly conventional and academic paintings thus constituted less a form of expressing the experience of the soldiers fighting in the ongoing modern war than a reconstruction of scenes from the Napoleonic Wars, a popular subject in Polish painting before the outbreak of World War I. There is a deeply symbolic dimension to the presence at the Legions Exhibition of artists who were featured at the Salon in 1913, many of whom had just put away their legion uniforms in 1915. The symbolism would prove highly influential in the formation of the Polish collective memory of the Great War.

It is worth recalling that 1913 was an anniversary year marking the tenth consecutive Salon at Zachęta as well as, and above all, the 50th anniversary of the outbreak of the January Uprising, the 150th anniversary of the birth of Józef Poniatowski and the 100th anniversary of his calamitous death in the Battle of Leipzig. The anniversary of the death of the Polish Army leader engendered a strongly political interpretation of the exhibition, which tended to emphasize—despite the content of many of the paintings presented in it—themes of battle and warfare at large. This aspect was noticed by critics writing about the Salon,[175] and even reflected in an advertisement appearing in the exhibition catalogue[176] announcing the release of Henryk Sienkiewicz's latest book, *The Legions*, set in the period from Napoleon I's Italian Campaign and the San Domingo expedition to the age of the Duchy of Warsaw and the Battle of Raszyn. Rightly

175 Adam Breza, "X-ta Wystawa 'Doroczna' w Warszawie," Świat 50 (1913), p. 11.
176 See *Salon 1913*. exh. cat. (Warsaw: Towarzystwo Zachęty Sztuk Pięknych w Królestwie Polskim, 1913).

pointed out by Wojciech Szymański is the fact that "the last and never-completed tale by Sienkiewicz, 'with illustrations by W. Kossak,' [...] was an expression and product of the early-20th-century culture of Polish memory that begot the paintings of Bagieński and Kossak presented at the Salon. That memory, revolving mainly around the debate on Poland's involvement in the Napoleonic epic, focused, especially in 1913, the year preceding the outbreak of the World War I, on the military might of the Duchy of Warsaw and its commander."[177]

I should add here that the memory of the commander was shaped in equal measure by his military and political courage and by the imagery of the soldier-prince, severely wounded in battle with Russian-Prussian armies and dying in a Polish uniform in the waters of Germany's White Elster River. In his famous sketch titled *The Crypt of St. Leonard*, Andrzej Kijowski even questions the leader's significance as a strategist and military commander, recalling that "in all his life, he did not win a single campaign or a single issue," and that "the road he set out on in the summer of 1813 did not lead to glory. [...] He left the country a political and military dead man; he came back to life on the bier and returned a hero he had never been."[178] After his death in a misdirected attack by the French, Prince Poniatowski became a national cult figure, which led to and was further reinforced by two exhumations of his corpse and three funerals: in 1813 at St. John's Cemetery in Leipzig, in 1814 in the catacombs of the Holy Cross Basilica in Warsaw, and in 1817 at Wawel Cathedral.

> Throughout the entire five-year long carnival," writes Andrzej Kijowski as he analyzes the rise of Prince Józef's posthumous cult, "there took shape once and for all, still functioning in literature and propaganda,

177 Wojciech Szymański, *Salon 1913: epoleta na uniformie swego fachu*, unpublished manuscript delivered from the author.
178 Andrzej Kijowski, "Krypta św. Leonarda," in Andrzej Kijowski, *Rachunek naszych słabości* (Warsaw: Dom Książki, 1994), pp. 144, 149.

> a stereotype of the Polish tragic hero, who loses his way because of his excessive love for his homeland and falls victim to geopolitics, and taking shape with it was the opposition of honor and reason, and idealism and realism.[179]

It was the last burial especially that bore the most heavily symbolic load. It also initiated the tradition of burying prophets and heroes at Wawel Cathedral, which transformed the Krakow cathedral into Poland's most prestigious necropolis. Nearly a century later, after his grand exhumation in Montmorency, Adam Mickiewicz was also buried at Krakow's Wawel Cathedral in a solemn funeral ceremony, which, as Stanisław Wyspiański argues in his *Liberation*, contributed greatly to the transformation of Mickiewicz (and his life's work) into a post-mortal symbol of a prophet/genius. The internment of Mickiewicz's ashes at the cathedral in 1890, as well as the earlier restoration of the royal tombs at Wawel (1872–78), preceded by the famous opening of Casimir III the Great's tomb in 1869, surely left an indelible mark on Wyspiański's imagination. Yet the artist used those events not so much to carry on the Polish tradition of mourning plays, nurturing the myth of dead martyrs, but rather to present, through theatrical means, ways in which the dead can exist among and impact the living. He showed how the dead can enter the scene of events and be a part of social life. In doing so he was the first to critically demonstrate the functioning of the "nineteenth-century mortuary imagination and custom."[180]

This tradition was reflected in Mickiewicz's Krakow funeral, which was endowed with heavy ideological significance, changing it from a manifestation of great nationalism to a spectacle of death centering on a sense of resentment towards Polish exile in France.

179 Ibid., p. 150.
180 Stanisław Rosiek, *Zwłoki Mickiewicza. Próba nekrografii poety* (Gdańsk: słowo/obraz terytoria, 1997), p. 70.

> "These Polish—these patriotic Polish-emigrational relics—alongside the equally Kosciuszko relics at Wawel—will remain as testimony, as incentive and as instruction," as Tomasz Teodor Jeż explains the approval of the Polish government-in-exile in France for transferring the poet's remains to the still-non-sovereign homeland. "If it were to occur that this is still insufficient, then, oh, we have much more equally significant bones in exile [...,] throngs of skeletons calling from their graves for the laws of Poland to be defended."[181]

And so it was on the remains of Prince Józef, the defender of the Duchy of Warsaw—that rudimental Polish state that, in varying forms survived until the end of the partitions—that the cult of the Polish leader was built. It not only served as inspiration for the insurgents in November 1830 and for the Polish people celebrating the return of Mickiewicz's ashes in 1890, but also became an important point of reference in 1914 for the commander of the Polish Legions, Józef Piłsudski. His funeral—preceded, as reported by *Gazeta Lwowska* on 15 May 1935, by "the transport of the marshal's body from Belweder to St. John's Cathedral" and then "by train, which will take it and the procession to Krakow"[182]—also proved to be significant, and due to the national period of mourning was the only spectacle organized for Polish society.

This peculiar necroperformance, played out in Poland during the long 19th century in a gesture of endurance and defense of traditional values, surely influenced the conservative nature of Polish revolutions. The cult of heroes shaped by the post-mortal life of Prince Józef Poniatowski was itself essentially conservative because it was "others, who threatened Pol-

181 Tomasz Teodor Jeż "Głos pielgrzyma," *Kurier Lwowski* 183 (July 4, 1890), cited in Maria Prussak, "Teatr ogromny? O pogrzebie Adama Mickiewicza," *Zeszyty Naukowe Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego. Prace Historycznoliterackie*, 58 (1985), p. 128.

182 "Ciało Marszałka Piłsudskiego spocznie na Wawelu," *Gazeta Lwowska* 110 (May 15, 1935), p. 1.

ish national existence and thus played the role of the agents of revolution."[183] It was also a national cult since it resulted from political circumstances and was upheld by the authorities "with the help of the era's propaganda methods."[184] Demonstrating the demand for heroes standing up for Polish values, Kijowski recalls the famous line by Jules Michelet that Poland was "killed by civilization and progress"—that is, the values of Western culture. In this way

> Poland, attacked for being traditional, became traditional; Polish ideologies, accused form outside of nationalism, became nationalistic, and all that was petty and poor in them grew and blossomed in the heroic figures of dead leaders.[185]

The connection of Polish cultural memory with the Napoleonic epic (or rather the Polish version of it), symbolized in the uniform of Polish uhlans, which were so eagerly reconstructed during later national-liberation campaigns—World War I included—influenced, in my opinion, the repression of any memory of the involvement of Polish soldiers like Witold Hulewicz fighting in the ranks of the Kaiser's army in the Great War. Attesting to the absence of German-uniformed Polish soldiers in the meticulously constructed myth and archive of the Polish Legions is not only the silence surrounding their history in Piłsudski's interwar Poland but also the fact that until the 2014 publication of Ryszard Kaczmarek's book *Poles in the Kaiser's Army*[186] there had been no solid works on Poles serving in that army on the frontlines of World War I. It is hard to reject the author's opinion that the reasons for this historical amnesia were political in nature and were largely connected

183 Kijowski, "Krypta św. Leonarda," p. 164.
184 Ibid., p. 167.
185 Ibid., p. 165.
186 Kaczmarek, *Polacy w armii kajzara.*

with the problematic issue of the "Polishness" of those Polish soldiers fighting in the German army. And this was due to more than merely the ideological shortcut taking place after World War II, when both of these armed conflicts were fused "into one example of German expansionism,"[187] thereby negating an autonomous treatment of the experience of Kaiser army soldiers beyond that of the Polish-traitor stereotype associated with those fighting in the Wehrmacht, the World War II Nazi forces. Kaczmarek underscores that Poles in the Kaiser's army—contrary to other Polish units—the regiments, divisions, and brigades existing in the Russian and Austrian armies—served as "soldiers, under-officers and, rarely, officers, in ethnically diverse units," which were in fact "part of the German forces fighting on almost all of the fronts of World War I, but could not actually be called Polish."[188]

The Polish soldiers exhibited no visual indication of their Polishness, like the zigzag collar trim of the legion uniforms, and—even more significantly—were not permitted to use their native language. Because of this fact, in the Polish collective imagination the Great War is not preserved, as it is in Western Europe, as a "murderous war," full of abuses, violence, disfigurement, and mass death, but as a "romantic uhlan skirmish" in which the only meaningful date was that of Poland's regained statehood on November 11, 1918. Likewise between Germans, the losers of the war as a result of political betrayal, and Poles, the winners in a war that wasn't theirs, there emerged a diametrical difference in the perception of that first 19th-century cultural catastrophe. As pointed out by Robert Traba, "when the Germans were living through the drama of Verdun, the tragic death of the 'flower of youth' fallen on Flanders' 'fields of glory' and the joy of the spectacular victory at Tannenberg, the Poles were applying their efforts to the construction of the

187 Ibid., p. 7.
188 Ibid., p. 8.

early, independent country."[189] Thus there is little wonder that in Polish cultural memory, a Pole in a German uniform and the Pickelhelm "did not survive, either as a culprit or a victim of the Great War. He simply disappeared, was forgotten."[190]

189 Robert Traba, "Zapomniana wojna. Wydarzenia lat 1914–1918 w polskiej i niemieckiej pamięci zbiorowej," in *Polacy i Niemcy. Historia – kultura – polityka*, eds. Andreas Lawaty and Hubert Orłowski (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, 2003), p. 59.
190 Kaczmarek, *Polacy*, p. 10.

Polish Angels of History

Theatre Angels

> A Klee drawing named *Angelus Novus* shows an angel looking as though he is about to move away from something he is fixedly contemplating. His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe that keeps piling ruin upon ruin and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. The storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress.[1]

This passage by Walter Benjamin is one of his most widely quoted. Taken from the ninth thesis of his essay "Theses on the Philosophy of History,"[2] written shortly before his suicide, it defines the horizon of thinking about history and modernity as a landscape of ruins. The allegorical vision of history presented here in a few very suggestive lines seduces the reader with its inherent dialectic fracture: in the figure of the Angel of History, Benjamin identifies the destructive dimension of progress as well as a means by which to repair the crumbling world. Historicism, which forms a universal and eternal picture of the past by gathering facts to

1 Walter Benjamin, "On the Concept of History," in Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings Number 4 1938–1940* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press, 2003), p. 392.

2 The essay, written in 1940, was published posthumously in 1942 in *Walter Benjamin zum Gedächtnis*, by the Frankfurt Institute for Social Research. While in Marseille, Benjamin gave the manuscript to Hannah Arendt (already having relocated to New York), who passed it on to the Frankfurt School.

fill in "homogenous, empty time," is offset, according to Benjamin, by a forceful Messianic materialistic historiography which, for the purpose of interrupting the continuity of history, is not afraid of stopping time and subjecting thought to the principles of construction. "Thinking," Benjamin argues, "involves not only the flow of thoughts, but their arrest as well. Where thinking suddenly stops in a configuration pregnant with tensions, it gives that configuration a shock, by which it crystalizes into a monad."[3] Only in this structure, a figure of absolute singularity while also a reflection of the whole, a structure that allows for a view from multiple perspectives, can a historical materialist recognize "the sign of a Messianic cessation of happening, or, put differently, a revolutionary chance in the fight for the oppressed past."[4] In showing ruins not as something of the past but as a trace of heterogeneous temporality, which also contains within itself a now that severs the continuum of (normative) history as well as a promise of (an alternative) future time, Benjamin allowed for the possibility of emancipatory necroperformance.

In 1959 Roman Polański—a surviving witness of the catastrophe of the storm of progress made manifest, the Holocaust—put forth an extraordinary picture of the Angel of History in a landscape of ruins. In his barely twenty-minute-long film, Kiedy spadają anioły (When Angels Fall), the director presents Poland's modern history—from the Napoleonic wars through World War II—shattering the continuum of events with a radical choice of perspective. Here Polish "history" is the object of an elderly bathroom attendant's construction, as she reminisces on her own life of spending her days in the public men's room located in a cellar. From the very outset we get the feeling that unfolding before us is a kind of counter-history, an alternative history told from the perspective of someone who has been excluded on many levels: female, elderly, a denizen of

3 Benjamin, "On the Concept of History," p. 396.
4 Ibid.

Fig. 11: Roman Polański as a soldier's mother in his film KIEDY SPADAJĄ ANIOŁY (*When Angels Fall*), 1959.

toilets where the oddest of male individuals convene. Yet it is in this cesspool, where an Austrian sword from the era of the Great War hangs on the wall above the woman's head, that a most peculiar revelation occurs: an angel appears in the likeness of the old lady's son. The old woman's reminiscences seemingly proceed chronologically. Still, this conventional portrayal of history, conducive to the analysis of details, at every step of the way undermines the credibility of a woman on death's doorstep as a historical witness. Our eighty-year-old protagonist leads us back to the time of her first love: we see a young, twenty-year-old woman standing at the window, first awaiting her lover, a Polish uhlan, and later in the throes of amorous rapture. It is a strangely familiar picture—like a stolen and extended version of the story depicted in Wojciech Kossak's painting *Ułan i dziewczyna* (An Uhlan and a Girl, 1907). Nearly everything fits: the rider's uniform, the girl's tunic and skirt, and the three colors dominating the landscape: white, blue, red. However, historically speaking, the time period in which this youthful scene takes place is not

Fig. 12: A soldier in a German uniform and the Pickelhelm, a film still from KIEDY SPADAJĄ ANIOŁY (*When Angels Fall*), 1959.

at all clear—after all, what kind of rider would have appeared at a young woman's house in the 1880s or '90s? In the shot preceding the love scene between the girl and the rider, we see a brigade of soldiers appear on a hilltop with the melody of a military song playing in the background. The look of the cavalrymen brings to mind Władysław Belina-Prażmowski's famous riders, the first unit of the Polish Legions, which descended from the Austrian partition onto the Russian-held Kingdom of Poland in 1914, the same year in which the famous legionnaire's song "Przybyli ułani pod okienko" (The Uhlans Arrived at the Window) was penned. The uniforms worn by the riders in the film are from the period of the Kingdom of Poland, established in 1815, and the November Uprising of 1830–31. In turn, the son, who had been "pressed into service," sets off for the front lines in 1914 in a German uniform and the Pickelhelm, later to appear in a Polish uniform and a French army helmet known as an "Adrian," which only became popular in the army of the Second Polish Republic and during World War II. We

watch on as images of the tragic experiences of the World War I soldier flash before our eyes, as the protagonist's son manages to escape death while wearing a depersonalizing gas mask, and later, by then a soldier in the Polish army, as he kills an innocent deserter from the German army (an intellectual pacifist with characteristic glasses in the mold of Bertolt Brecht) only to himself ultimately die on the front lines. What remains after his demise is nothing more than a landscape of ruin. But what ruins are these? And from which war exactly?

In *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* Walter Benjamin recalls the "baroque cult of ruin" as he writes about its artificiality, which "appears as the last heritage of an antiquity" and can be accepted and respected by modernity "only in its material form, as a picturesque field of ruins."[5] It seems that, in his thesis film, Polański—much like Benjamin in his unrealized habilitation thesis[6]—wanted to "trace out a picture of the world in brief" by referencing the falseness and theatricality of history in ruins. And this is why When Angels Fall portrays just such "picturesque ruins" composed of shards, fragments, and pictures left behind by the history of Polish art and culture. Many years later, in his autobiography, the director recalls the film:

> It was to give viewers a feeling of a momentum, even though it does not exceed twenty minutes. Above all, I wanted to give [the son] a romantic, almost baroque style that borders on kitsch, so that the audience would accept this story as a woman's daydream at the end of life. Old people fascinated me. I have always felt that the elderly—even more than children—deserve care and attention.[7]

5 Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, trans. John Osborne (London: Verso, 2003), p. 178.

6 Walter Benjamin, *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels* (Berlin: Rowohlt 1928). Benjamin was afraid of the rejection of his book by the traditional academic at the university in Frankfurt and withdrew the submitted work.

7 Roman Polański, *Roman*, trans. Kalina and Piotr Szymanowscy (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Polonia, 1989), p. 121.

Looking at it from such a perspective, the protagonist is no longer to be considered an unreliable historical witness. Polański seems to be saying that if we abandon traditional "objective" historicism, we will be able to recognize legitimate claims about the past. We must only learn to hear whether—as Benjamin asserts—"there [is] not an echo of those who have been silenced in the voices to which we lend our ears today," and to ask "Don't the women we court have sisters they no longer recognize?"[8] We must also concede that a true picture of the past does not exist, while also accepting that the past can only be grasped as a picture that—like the film's picture of the falling angel—"flashes up at the moment of its recognizability, and is never seen again."[9]

Polański, however, goes even further in his dramatization of the ruins of history than the theatrical weight of debris suggested by Benjamin in his thesis on German tragic drama. In his unwavering ironic depiction of the falsity of events as depicted in conventional historical narratives, the Polish director denies an apocalyptic vision of history, also refraining from unveiling the past's messianic purpose. And most importantly—unlike Benjamin, for whom language was the ultimate medium of messianic activity (as it was also the medium of both the experience and the manifestation[10])—Polański discovers his own media for historical manifestation in radical theatrics: in masks, costumes, and role-playing. With this in mind, a scene that becomes very telling is the one in which the hunched restroom attendant, offering her son a parcel as he sets off for the Great War, turns out to be none other than Roman Polański himself. Yet it is primarily the angel shattering the glass ceiling in the men's room (a top for some while a bottom for others) in

8 Benjamin, "On the Concept of History," p. 390.
9 Ibid.
10 See Adam Lipszyc, *Sprawiedliwość na końcu języka. Czytanie Waltera Benjamina* (Krakow: Universitas, 2012), p. 20.

the film's conclusion that reveals its artificial nature. The fact that the angel's theatricality supersedes the picture of history has already been suggested in the film's first scene, where we see a model panorama of the city followed by a shot of the angel as an automated mechanical figurine ringing a bell in a clock tower.

Looking at it from this perspective, this bold history of Polish modernity appears to be nothing more than an assortment of notions of Polishness left behind as residue of Romantic myths concerning nationhood and liberation. A myth that appropriates history will, in a traditional way, firmly bond generations. A perfect piece of evidence in support of the patriarchal authority of Polishness is the image of the uhlan and girl that has been passed down from father to son (and grandson) in the patriotic battle-themed paintings of Juliusz Kossak, Wojciech Kossak, and Jerzy Kossak. This is a phantasm that recurs in three generations of Polish painters in the same gender stereotype, albeit in different settings (wars) and in various costumes (uniforms). Polański seems to subscribe to Klaus Theweleit's thesis on the peculiar self-referentiality of war discourse based on the fact that war places front and center the man who writes about it.

> He is either the source of, or is in some way connected to, every explosion; the end of the world is staged on his behalf and from within him. The arena of war is first and foremost his own body; a body poised to penetrate other bodies and mangle them in its embrace. [11]

Playing with Polish mythical time and with the traditional patriarchal model of Polishness, Polański wants to reclaim history in order to open it up for others. This is why he entrusts the narration to an old woman and gives center stage in his story to World War I, which has been all but forgotten in Polish history.

11 Theweleit, *Male Fantasies*,*Male Fantasies*, trans. Stephen Conway (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989 [vol. 2]), p. 191.

At the same time the director stages Polish history inside a public men's restroom among male "oddballs"—shady, Kafkaesque civil servants, "effeminate clients," and cruising homosexuals. All of this creates the impression that Polański's angel has more in common with the angel Prior from Tony Kushner's *Angels in America* (1991) than with the figure in Klee's painting. Jean Howard characterizes the "theatrical angel" Prior in *Tony Kushner's Angel Archive and the Re-visioning of American History*:

> Prior's angel is a theatrical angel, a creature of flesh and blood dressed up in a costume. Not a supernatural force, the angel embodies the earthly hopes of the human imagination using art to create new histories and new possibilities. [...] Kushner's theatrical angels are now part of a new archive of angels in America. They are central to Kushner's "gay fantasia on national themes" and central to his belief in the power of theater to recall us to the great earthly work of re-imagining our political life, in America and in the world, now.[12]

Relying on the archive of Polish national myths, Polański saturates his film with theatricality to produce a different kind of historical knowledge. Consequently, this oft-overlooked movie implores us to ask questions like: Is there room in Polish history for a "new archive of angels," whose return to the stage of history can be acknowledged as a sign of the modern world's "disenchantment"? Does this history include theatrical angels functioning outside of the Romantic paradigm of Angel of Death vs. Guardian Angel? What about secularized angels, false ones, queer ones, appearing as male and female figures in disguise? Or as figures enabling us to re-imagine Poland's modern history and our political life, including the present?

12 See Jean E. Howard, "Tony Kusher's Angel Archive and the Re-visioning of American History," www.hemisphericinstitute.org/hemi/en/e-misferica-91/howard#sthash.TnY9FFYy.C0tColZG.dpuf.

Offering an invaluable context for such deliberation is the film MS 101 (2012)[13] by contemporary visual artist Karol Radziszewski, who performs a provocative theatricalization of archival documents so as to raise awareness of the privileged position of men in the creation of history. He does so by spinning a visually ostentatious and richly ornamented but heroics-free tale that he calls a "homoeroic" story. Being conscious of the pervasive suppression of World War I in Polish art, Radziszewski deliberately loads MS 101 with figures and documents belonging to a foreign, that is, Western, history. The film tells the story of the relationship between two great figures in European culture, both residing in Krakow at the time of the First World War—Ludwig Wittgenstein[14] and the wounded poet George Trakl. So the Krakow Military Clinical Hospital, where Trakl, who is recovering from posttraumatic stress disorder, decides to preempt death on the battlefield by committing suicide, becomes the site of a phantasmatic meeting of World War I soldiers. The relation of this possible, though never enacted, intimate—and sexual—relationship, set against that great historical backdrop, is carried along with the help of the philosopher Wittgenstein's frontline journal; his correspondence with Trakl and with David Pinsent, a former lover from Cambridge, where Wittgenstein studied from 1912 until the outbreak of war; and a series of other documents from the period, among them writings of Sigmund Freud, Otto Weininger, and Thomas Mann.

Unlike Polański's film, whose origins lie in images, MS 101 is based on written history recorded in wartime journals and

13 The film premiered on June 17, 2012 at the Military Clinical Hospital in Krakow.

14 In 1914, Wittgenstein volunteered for the army. He spent three years on the Russian front, where he took part in and survived the famous Brusilov Offensive of 1916. From the beginning of 1918 he fought on the Italian front as a second lieutenant, for which he received multiple decorations (including a Gold Medal for Bravery). After Austria's capitulation he was taken to the prisoner camp in Monte Cassino.

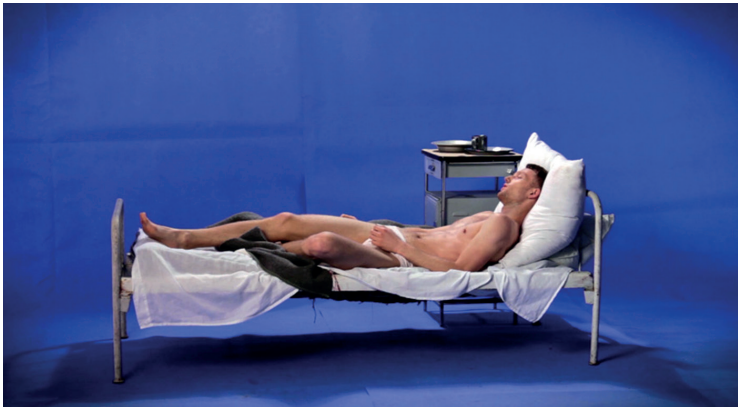

Fig. 13: A film still from MS 101 by Karol Radziszewski, 2012.

letters, and thus in words: text and discourse. Radziszewski's work undoubtedly complies with the conviction of post-Derridian memory theorists that, essentially, "the actual and final location of memory is in textuality, or rather intertextuality."[15] In MS 101 there is no such thing as a pure, unmarked body—the body is a web of discursive ideas, a vessel and a tool for knowledge/power. This is why, from the outset, the spoken narration in the film openly addresses the embroilment of the body in a series of linguistic apparatuses: sexual, psychological, and political. Interestingly, the narration is provided by a female actor (Stanisława Celińska)—present only in voice—who functions in this story as something of an invisible but ever-present Mother, who undermines the presumed masculinity of historical narration. To examine the function of discourse more closely, the director places the male body of the soldier in a warzone, and thus in an exceptional situation where biopolitics are at stake. He places it in spaces or institutions that exert

15 Günter Bützer, "Gedächtnismetaphorik", in *Gedächtniskonzepte der Literaturwissenschaft*, eds. Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, New York, 2005), p. 15.

Fig. 14: A film still from MS 101 by Karol Radziszewski, 2012.

a strict discipline on the body—for example, the psychiatric ward in a military hospital—thereby surreptitiously exploring their emancipatory potential. This transformation from discipline to freedom is carried out in MS 101 through a subverted use of text documents, historical sites, and museum artifacts. For Radziszewski, these real places—"military hospital, ward number 5 for psychiatric and kidney disorders"—and objects (military uniforms, weapons) undergo a process of theatricalization and become nothing more than decoration, stage dressing, props.

The overt theatricality and especially the means used to achieve it, that is the strategy of including behind-the-scenes looks, as well as the extensive use of the blue box technique, can be interpreted as intertextual allusions to the films of Derek Jarman (Wittgenstein and Blue), acknowledged as one of the pioneers of queer cinema.[16] However, we can also identify in the theatricality a means for realizing the emancipatory

16 Niall Richardson offers interesting insight on Derek Jarman as the father of queer cinema in *The Queer Cinema of Derek Jarman: Critical and Cultural Readings* (London: I.B.Tauris, 2009).

potential of placing a phantasm at the center of the narrative. The phantasm—hence a certain dramatized imaginary scenario for which the body serves as a medium between internal and external images[17]—is the principle reason for utilizing theatrical masks, costumes, and illusion as methods for interpreting historical documents. Only when the document and biography clash with theatricality can we see the incompatibility of evidence, and in turn the relativity of the normative codes of representation. At this point there emerges a peculiar countervisuality that surpasses mere reduction to the image's surface, thereby accentuating the creator's fluid point of view and constantly appealing to the body of the observer. Above all, MS 101 is a series of bodily performances—from *la petite mort* to actual death (from fellatio to multiple instances of masturbation, to Trakl's suicide and Pinsent's death in a military plane catastrophe). Yet these performances do not lay claim to the radical directness of performance art, choosing instead to reveal their fictionality, similitude, and manifold dependencies.

The strong theatricality plays a part in raising the curtain on the politics of memory by telling non-heteronormative stories, and by creating alternative representational codes and memory images. Through the prism of a melodramatic story of soldiers' homosexual fantasies, the war is depicted from a completely different perspective than the universally shared popular film and photo images of the Great War: the trenches with their rats, lice, filth, gas, and piles of corpses. The war is not recalled from the perspective of the battlefield but from the fringes of warfare, partly in bounds and partly out of bounds: places like the woods or a military hospital. These places become *de facto* shelters from the violence of the battlefield; they afford the men a temporary escape from their identity as a soldier, to act in a

17 Such an interpretation of phantasm was proposed many years ago by Maria Janion in her *Projekt krytyki fantazmatycznej. Szkice o egzystencjach ludzi i duchów* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo PEN, 1991).

sort of wartime liminal zone—no longer a soldier but not yet a civilian. This liminality enables a momentary suspension of military laws and regulations, as well as the removal of the uniform and a move towards nakedness—the chance to shed the wartime masculine girdle and at least partially expose the body. This is well illustrated in a scene in which Trakl strips down to his underwear and performs a sort of muscle dance on the hospital bed, with the camera tracking the muscles' work centimeter by centimeter, rendering the movement as something of a media-choreographic routine. The hospital is also where Trakl ultimately decides to kill himself by taking a deadly dose of cocaine.

"By means of a double negative the liar is forced to tell the truth. Thanks to the double negative the liar is forced to reveal his own identity"—these are the words uttered at the end of the film, alluding to the story of a village of truth-tellers and a village of liars in Werner Herzog's film The Enigma of Kaspar Hauser (1974).[18] At the same time these words sum up the story told in MS 101—from the perspective of a double negation (as a Polish patriot and a heterosexual man) we arrive, despite a lack of historical documents, at the possible (and credible) identification of a Polish artist with the depicted figures of soldiers (and

18 "Imagine you are standing at a crossroads: one road leads to a village of truth-tellers and the other to a village of liars. A person approaches you and you wonder which village they are coming from. To solve the dilemma, you may ask only a single question. You must think logically. You have only one question. So, what is the question? I know, it's difficult. If you ask the person if they are coming from the truth-tellers' village then they would say yes if they were a truth-teller. But a person from the liars' village would lie and say yes too. There is, however, one and only one question with which you could solve the riddle. This is a logical dilemma. Think about it. One question. You don't know? Then I will give you a hint. If you were coming from the other village, would you answer 'no' if I asked you whether you are coming from the liars' village? You don't understand. By means of a double negative the liar is forced to tell the truth. Thanks to the double negative the liar is forced to reveal his own identity. We call this the logic of reaching an absolute by argumentation. There is no other question. According to the highest laws of logic, there is no other." Cited from Wojciech Szymański, *MS 101*, unpublished screenplay.

simultaneously artists/philosophers) belonging to an opposing army, as well as Radziszewski's identification as an openly gay Polish Catholic with an Austrian homosexual Jew. A doubling of the excluded—of the gay Polish Catholic and the gay Austrian Jew from the history of the so-called Great Way—in the context of the phallocratic system responsible for the war becomes a double overcoming in MS 101: the film creates a common front for those about whom Polish history is all too silent and those who are deprived of a voice—Jews and homosexuals. Lying in his hospital bed, Trakl says these revealing words: "The theatre of masks … the theatre of masks is, as I see it, of a spiritualist character. Therefore, it is perhaps only Jews who tend towards this theatre."

The appropriation of otherness as documentary material for an alternative history of one's own culture also makes it possible to see what is universally known and repeated with mythical reverence in the culture in a new light. In MS 101's final scene, instead of a documentary depiction of Pinsent's death in the war during air maneuvers, Radziszewski shows us "a lifeless David in an armchair, wounded and with blood on his torso," eerily reminiscent of the figure of Gustaw from Mickiewicz's *Forefathers' Eve* as he appears in Tadeusz Konwicki's 1989 film Lawa. Opowieść o 'Dziadach' Adama Mickiewicza (Lava: A Tale of Adam Mickiewicz's *Forefathers' Eve*). This image is followed by a slow retreat of the camera as it gradually reveals the entire soundstage with all its apparatuses of cameras, cables, and lighting equipment, and with all the test shots and stills documenting the work and the process behind the creation of these cinematic fragments of the World War I-era discourse on love. In fact these fragments seem like an ironic mirror image of the Polish theatre of death so firmly rooted in Romantic historicism and the myth of the sacred Polish Legions. This hypertheatricality, utilized by Radziszewski as a medium to critique Polish historical narration, simultaneously acts as a furtive commen-

tary on "legionnaire drama" and its sanctification of war in the name of liberation/resurrection.[19]

Wojciech Szymański, the author of the screenplay for MS 101, suggests that the mere violation of "the (hetero)normative aesthetic rule of *decorum* governing all narratives on war, this 'extract of Polishness,'" constitutes a kind of breakthrough in Polish cultural history. Though he rightly adds that "this nevertheless does not mean that the *decorum* governing war stories based on texts and images that form Polish memory does not address certain subjects—including the 'male love' so offensive to Wittlin—because they simply do not exist. It means that, as we read in the final sentence of Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, 'Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent.'"[20] Perhaps this is the reason why the story told in MS 101 turns to Austrian and British soldiers (artist-intellectuals), indicating that the Polish memory of World War I includes no alternative stories at all because it is devoid of any sources documenting those that do not comply with the image of the heroic legionnaire—the only fully Polish soldier[21]—shaped by the rhetoric of national independence; or, as I am arguing here, because Polish memory of World War I continues to suppress such sources.

Wittgenstein's seventh proposition, after all, does not prohibit speaking but rather demands silence on things that are

19 On legionnaire drama as a conventionalized form continuing the tradition of Messianism and Tyrtaean poetry, see Dobrochna Ratajczakowa, *Obrazy narodowe w dramacie i teatrze* (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Wiedza o kulturze, 1994), pp. 310–42.

20 Wojciech Szymański, "Obraz Wielkiej Wojny. MS 101 i homoeroiczna pamięć figuratywna," in *Grolsch – ArtBoom Festival w Krakowie, Twierdza Kraków, 15–29 czerwca 2012* (Krakow: Krakowskie Biuro Festiwalowe, 2012), p. 43.

21 Offering interesting insight on the contrast between Polish soldiers fighting in partitioning armies and Polish soldiers in legion formations is Marcin Jarząbek, "Zwycięzcy nie swojej wojny – weterani I wojny światowej w II Rzeczypospolitej na tle europejskim," in *Drogi odrębne, drogi wspólne. Problem specyfiki rozwoju historycznego Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej w XIX–XX wieku*, ed. Maciej Janowski (Warsaw: Instytut Historii Polskiej Akademii Nauk, 2014).

in essence inexpressible. Assuming that silence simply equates with not speaking, we can ask if that which cannot be expressed in words can be thought of, as is philosophy's method ("philosophy's language is silence"[22]), or even, as is done in theatre, can be acted out with the body. For most, the traces of silence remain invisible, which, however, does not mean that inexpressible things that are thought or acted out simply disappear. In his essay titled *Ephemera as Evidence,*[23] Jose Esteban Muñoz correctly asserts that ephemera—"tropes of emotions and lived experience"—do not disappear at all, but on the contrary are clearly material ("without necessarily being solid"), though not perceptible to all. Relying on Raymond Williams's structures of feeling, Muñoz also attempts to demonstrate that all kinds of traces, flickers, and remnants become a medium for communicating (the history of) otherness.

> Ephemera, as I am using it here, is linked to alternate modes of textuality and narrativity like memory and performance: it is all of those things that remain after a performance, a kind of evidence of what has transpired but certainly not the thing itself. It does not rest on epistemological foundations but is instead interested in following traces, glimmers, residues, and specks of things. It is important to note that ephemera is a mode of proofing and producing arguments often worked by minoritarian culture and criticism makers.[24]

Considering ephemeral phenomena, which cannot be considered as a proof in the normative (dominant) culture, Muñoz thus indirectly formulates the idea of emancipatory necroperformance. In the light of his theory, the emancipatory necro-

22 See Bogusław Wolniewicz, "Wstęp. O 'Traktacie,'" in Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus logico-philosophicus* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 2000), p. XXXV.
23 Jose Esteban Muñoz, "Ephemera as Evidence: Introductory Notes to Queer Acts," in *Women & Performance. Journal of Feminist Theory* 8, 2 (1996), pp. 5–16.
24 Ibid., p. 10.

performance can be defined not only as a trace of evidence or a means of preserving marginalized presence but also as an alternative possibility for or way of seeing, as a peculiar code that is only decipherable from a certain—minority, but paradoxically privileged—perspective.

Women in Disguise

In the quest for new Polish Angels of History—historical figures who deconstruct the dominant narrative—I follow in the footsteps of Polański and Radziszewski to place at the center of my analysis a moment that is liminal, groundbreaking, and at the same time paradigmatic of issues connected with the matter of identity: World War I. On the one hand the Great War marked the end of Poland's direct subservience to the three empires (Prussia, Russia, and Austria), giving voice to a culture that had been preserved mainly in art, literature, customs, and cultural performances, but had been left out of the historical narrative. On the other it ushered in an explosion of modernity. It not only caused the collapse of Europe's geopolitical and social foundations but also the dissolution of the concept of male subjectivity cultivated by that culture. The most concrete manifestation of this shift in Poland turned out to be Marshal Piłsudski's decree of November 28, 1918—hard-won by women's organizations who persisted throughout the war—which declared that "an elector of the Sejm [Polish parliament] may be any citizen, irrespective of sex," and that a parliamentary seat may be held by "any citizen possessing the valid right to vote."[25] Nonetheless, the agitational-

25 The first draft of the constitution prepared by the Provisional Council of State in January 1917 speaks of only men being citizens: "The Fatherland needs all of its sons and none shall decline service thereto." Likewise, the draft of the electoral law published in March 1917 by the Central National Committee envisioned the right to vote as belonging to "persons of the male sex." See Joanna Dufrat, *Kobiety w kręgu lewicy niepodległościowej. Od Ligi Kobiet Pogotowia*

propagandic war discourse did not subside after 1918 and continued to uphold the image of the male soldier as the central figure of the nation state, all the while drawing upon the template of the patriotic liberation myth from the 19th century.

Here I wish to take a closer look at two forms of activity common to soldiers of the Polish Legions, in which gender and national identity were a crucial component: the functioning of frontline theatres and the involvement of women in the Polish army. The two main groups connected with these phenomena—male soldiers playing women's roles and female soldiers in disguise as men—seem to undermine the dominant bodily cultural code of the Polish soldier. Analyzing these phenomena on the basis of archival documents—photographs, theatre programs, political decrees, journals, and memoirs—I would like to raise a series of questions that were unvoiced at the time despite their considerable relevance: Why do these figures continue to be blank spaces in Polish historical-cultural study relating to the World War I? Have they been brought into the nationalistic discourse, and if so, to what degree? What connection does this peculiar form of "queering" the soldier's identity have with the independence discourse? Did the theatre, as a domain of fiction, illusion, and frolic, tolerate and/or encourage the emancipatory nature of the game of identity? Is the figure of the female soldier in disguise merely a remnant of the 19th-century fantasy of Lithuanian women knights who, fighting and sacrificing their lives for Poland, became a symbol of revolutionary struggle in Romantic literature?[26] Or can we identify in these figures a legitimate aspiration to the emancipation of Polish women?

Inviting some rather bold conclusions are two postcards discovered in the collection of the National Library in Warsaw,

Wojennego do Ochotniczej Legii Kobiet (1908–1918/19) (Toruń: Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek, 2001), pp. 281–82.

26 For a full analysis of women in the knightly, heroic tradition see Maria Janion, *Kobiety i duch inności* [Women and the Spirit of Dissidence] (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Sic!, 1996).

showing a woman dressed as an uhlan cavalryman. In one of the postcards she is shown in close-up, embracing and pressing cheeks with a woman in a white dress and bonnet. The other card depicts her in a disciplinary yet erotic stance as she sternly grasps the jaw of a woman in a black dress seated on the chair. Though the postcards are dated imprecisely—one is stamped 1900–20 and the other 1900–30—a number of details indicate a more exact timeframe and context for the photographs. The uniform worn by the uhlan woman brings to mind the uniform worn by the 1st Uhlan Regiment of the Polish Legions, known colloquially as a "Beliniak" (after the regiment's founder Władysław Zygmunt Belina-Prażmowski). Thus the woman's uniform can be dated to the 1920s, though it does differ from the genuine uniform in several details: the eagle pinned onto the shako is smaller than it should be, the collar flaps consist of two stars and a wide officer's rope, which first appeared during the era of the Second Republic of Poland (1918–45); in use earlier was a much thinner rope, the stars likely repeated on the epaulets, which was not done in the Polish Legions but started in the army of the Second Republic). Additionally, one other detail stands out in the second photo, in which we see a full-body shot of the woman: the dress of the woman sitting on the chair barely covers her mid-calves, which would suggest the early 1920s. We can thus surmise that the uniformed woman appearing in both postcards was an actress or model and her uniform a costume from a photography studio or a theatre costume imitating the uniform of the 1st Regiment of the Polish Legions from 1914 to 1917. In relation to the dramatization of women's war experience, quite telling is the quatrain appearing in the upper right corner of the second postcard:

> It is my legacy after my father
> To defend the homeland
> With you, my sweet, I cannot go
> So remain at home with God

This ironic statement accompanying the ambiguous relationship between the female uhlan and her female companion suggests that what we are dealing with here is a nationalistic farce, a joke on the Polish uhlan tradition rather than an authentic gesture of emancipation for female soldiers from the era of the Great War.

"This is not history. These are personal recollections of female participants of important historical events, expressed within the framework of historical continuity,"[27] assert the editors of *Wierna służba* (Loyal Service) and *Służba ojczyźnie* (Service to the Homeland), a two-book work from the late 1920s comprising a unique collection of documents that attest to the large-scale involvement of Polish women in the military during World War I. The accounts of women participating in the fight for independence are evidence of the ambiguity of the position of women soldiers in, simultaneously, the Polish independence discourse and in real wartime politics. These female legionnaire stories span the years 1910 to 1918, and, through the prism of individual experience, they trace the history of the formation of military women's organizations beginning with the prewar Division of Female Polish Shooting Squads and on to the League of Women in Military Emergency Care, the Female Division of Polish Military Organization, all the way to the early days of the Volunteer Women's League, the first regular women's military formation, which began in 1919 during the fighting in Lviv and Vilnius. None of these organizations had any real precedence in Europe,[28] as they were deeply rooted in the tradition

27 Aleksandra Piłsudska, Maria Rychterówna, Wanda Pełczyńska, and Maria Dąbrowska, eds. *Wierna służba. Wspomnienia uczestniczek walk o niepodległość 1910–1915* (Warsaw: Główna Księgarnia Wojskowa, 1927), p. VII. The second volume bears the title *Służba ojczyźnie. Wspomnienia uczestniczek walk o niepodległość 1915–1918*, ed. Maria Rychterowna (Warsaw: Główna Księgarnia Wojskowa, 1929).

28 Women (such as Sofia Halechko and Hanna Dmyterko) also fought in the Ukrainian Legions, established within the Austro-Hungarian army just after the outbreak of World War I. Like the Polish Legions, they arose out of shooting

Fig. 15/16: Female Polish soldier and a woman, staged postcards, ca. 1900–1920. Description above: It is my legacy after my father/ To defend the homeland/ With you, my sweet, I cannot go/ So remain at home with God.

of Polish insurgent movements and—this is significant—were a part of the Piłsudski left, thus being "subject to corresponding political processes and external influences."[29] The matter of their direct ties to Piłsudski, however, significantly curtailed the emancipatory potential of their activity, which was limited to traditional women's military service focusing on areas like medical care, provisions, courier services, intelligence, charity work, and propaganda.

As early as September 1914, Commander Piłsudski issued an order for the removal of the women's rifle unit from the military

associations and were not a real military force, serving mainly a propaganda function. For more on this, see Ernst Rutkowski: *Die k.k. Ukrainische Legion 1914–1918* (Vienna: Holzhausen, 2009).

29 Dufrat, *Kobiety w kręgu lewicy niepodległościowej*, p. 10.

structure, which was followed by a categorical ban on frontline duty. In fact—as argued by Aleksandra Piłsudska, one of the editors of *Wierna służba*—for the rest of his life the commander remained staunchly opposed to women serving on the frontlines, though he was well aware that women in disguise existed in his legions. Indicative of this is a scene in which legionnaire Maria Rychterówna meets with Piłsudski in Zagórze in November 1914:

> "Commander," I asked once more, "and the women? What happened to them?"
> The Commander's eyes lit up with cheer as he replied:
> "What? Have you not heard about the order to remove all women from the frontlines?"
> "So what about the time—I can name names—I fought for my more fortunate sisters."
> He pretended to be deeply upset.
> "Give me the names … of the battalion and company commanders. They will all be summoned!"
> "Oh, that I cannot do." I retreated a bit in fear. "I don't really know!"
> At that the Commander laughed merrily.
> "So, as you yourself can see, there aren't any."[30]

Taking into consideration the protective attitude of the leader of the Polish Legions, it is no wonder that the number of Polish women fighting on the frontlines in the Great War is impossible to ascertain today. By and large, their relatively tolerated but formally illegal presence left little in the way of lasting traces and "reliable" documents—military IDs, medical records, or awards or decorations for service. What does remain of the women soldiers, however, are memories—the accounts of survivors and the stories of witnesses. As stated by Joanna Dufrat in her book *Kobiety w kręgu lewicy niepodległościowej* (Women in Independent Left Circles), it is possible to conclude

30 Maria Rychterówna, "Listopad w Zagórzu," in *Wierna służba*, pp. 100–01.

Fig. 17: Ochotnicza Legia Kobiet (Women's Volunteer League) in Lviv, 1918–1919.

Fig. 18: Ochotnicza Legia Kobiet (Women's Volunteer League) in Lviv, 1918–1919.

with certainty that in the period between September 1914 and October 1916 (when the legion brigades were recalled from the front), there were ten women known by name and surname who served in the First and Second Brigades, all of them frontline medics. Additionally there were a few women disguised as men, four serving as medics on the frontlines: Kazimiera Niklewska (aka Kazimierz Niklewski), Maria Wołoszyńska (aka Alfred Wołoszyński), Ludwika Daszkiewiczowa (aka Stanisław Kepisz) and Maria Błaszczykówna (aka Tadeusz Zalewski); as well as the mounted liaison and later infantry soldier Zofia Plewińska (aka Leszek Pomianowski); and artillery soldier Wanda Gertzówna (aka Kazik Żuchowicz). Most of their stories are recalled in the pages of *Wierna służba* and *Służba ojczyźnie*, where, in moving accounts recorded ten years after the war's conclusion, the war remains as a landscape of ruins and total destruction—razed forests, solitary chimneys, rubble, cinders, bombed earth, and fields full of corpses.

In the accounts of women legionnaires who, against their will, served away from the frontlines in traditional roles that they inherited from the "quiet heroines" of the January Uprising, as Maria Bruchnalska writes,[31] what is made clear is a deep bitterness about Piłsudski's decision and a sense of disapproval of the auxiliary role imposed on female units, but also hope that the removal of women from the frontlines is only temporary. The individual accounts come together to form something of a story of defeat, of broken dreams of being a soldier, or disappointment over being relegated to working in a field hospital or in the intelligence service. What takes shape is a palpable conflict between the desires and needs of the women and the system, structures, and regulations of the military, a conflict symbolized by the figure of the female soldier: real yet at the same time only potential

31 Maria Bruchnalska, *Ciche bohaterki. Udział kobiet w powstaniu styczniowym (materiały)* (Miejsce Piastowe: Wydawnictwo Towarzystwa św. Michała Archanioła, 1933).

and phantasmatic, emancipatory yet repressed and oppressed by the actual positions granted to women during the war. Anna Minkowska, who served as a medic, wrote about this discrepancy:

> Quite odd was the position of women in the war! Men were in great demand in the war; each new legionnaire was welcomed to the ranks with open arms. Women, meanwhile, were treated with distrust and contempt—it was always as if there were too many of them, and it wasn't believed that they could do the work, though there was so much to do. [...] And it was our humble impression that even the weakest of soldiers on the front carried greater worth than the most courageous woman away from the front. That was perhaps the reason for the need to sacrifice and outdo oneself; that was the reason for the belief that even the hardest work made so little difference, because what was really needed was fighting—everything else was just a shadow, secondary to what was most important.[32]

This inner tension bred a peculiar obsession to be "a woman in disguise" who, through falsifying her identity, would not have to stifle her tenacious desire for military duty. The recollections of Maria Wołoszyńska, which recently joined the collection of the Polish Army Museum, conclusively demonstrate that the falsification or theft of documentation was perceived by women joining the armed forces as a kind of initiation.

> I took the army documents of my paternal cousin, which bore the name Alfred Wołoszyński, and that's how I got my pseudonym. I found a friend who also wanted to get to the front. But she didn't have documents. I asked my brother to find a way to get some for her. That afternoon, we got them, issued for one Stanisław Kepisz, and that is how Ludwika Daszkiewicz got her pseudonym.[33]

32 Anna Minkowska, "Ospa w szpitalu," in *Wierna służba*, pp. 142–43.
33 Maria Wołoszyńska, *Wspomnienia*, unedited and unpublished typed manuscript from the collection of the Polish Army Museum in Warsaw, pp. 6–7.

The act of legalizing one's identity was not only a condition for a woman joining the armed forces, it was also a prerequisite for acquiring government documentation verifying her presence on the front after concluding her service, and above all certifying the conformity of her legally acquired male persona with her real female identity.[34]

The process of returning to a female identity did not end the way some women expected it to. Quite indicative is the case of Wanda Gertz, who was actually the only woman on the front lines granted permission to participate in battle with a weapon in hand. Though she took part in the battle on the Styr and the Stochód in August 1916, her account focusses less on her battlefield experiences than on the issue of identity, or rather, the mere ritual of transitioning from a woman to a soldier. The haircut before reporting for duty, putting on the soldier's uniform, assuming the male name Kazimierz, and falsifying her passport to bear the surname of Żuchowicz—these acts mark the gradual process of her transformation. However, Gertz remained in fear of being found out as a woman, which arose from the incongruity between the female organs she attempted to hide under her uniform and her apparently masculine face and posture. Her decision to come out as a woman to her superior allowed her to forego the regular medical check-ups that would have ultimately revealed her true identity anyway. After revealing herself as a woman, Gertz no longer had to focus on her presentation of self and could turn her attention to her own intimate personal experience of the war. Her recollections of the war center on her multi-sensual experience of the reality of war, which becomes evident in the fragments where Gertz writes about getting goosebumps and feeling a certain physical pleasure during attacks, offensives, gunshots, and grenade

34 See ibid., pp. 10–11.

Fig. 19: Portrait of Wanda Gertz.

explosions.[35] Taking on a symbolic significance is the day when she temporarily loses her eyesight as a result of shell shock. She ceases to differentiate colors and contours yet, instead of seeing a doctor, simply retreats from the frontline. Shortly thereafter she decides to go on furlough, and never returns to the army (due to Piłsudski's resignation while she is away). "There was no reason to go back. So I stayed a civilian."[36] With these words she concludes her involvement in the Great War, which, as it would later turn out, was to be only the beginning of her professional service in the Polish Army.[37]

35 Wanda Gertzówna (Kazik Żuchowicz), "W pierwszym pułku artylerji," in *Służba ojczyźnie*, p. 55.

36 Ibid., p. 59.

37 Anna Nowakowska writes in detail about Gertz's future as a soldier in the Polish Army from 1919 up to her service in the Home Army and her death in exile in London in 1958. Anna Nowakowska, *Wanda Gertz. Opowieść o kobiecie żołnierzu* (Krakow: Avalon, 2009).

Fig. 20: Portrait of Wanda Gertz on horseback.

Wanda Gertz quickly transformed into the mythical figure of the "woman soldier in disguise," often compared to a great predecessor from the November Uprising, Emilia Plater,[38] who had also performed the ritual gesture of cutting off her hair and sewing a man's uniform prior to setting off to battle as a man armed with a pistol and daggers. Soon the legend of Wanda Gertz as the new Emilia Plater grew so strong that she became a model for a host of interpretations of a what a woman in combat should be. The most notable was the revival of Mickiewicz's Grażyna (from his narrative poem *Grażyna*, 1823), the literary prototype for Emilia Plater, who in real life legitimized the story of the courageous Lithuanian woman created by the bard: "The word became flesh and Grażyna became Emilia Plater."[39] As Stefania Skwarczyńska convincingly writes in her 1932 article "Emilia Plater jako realizacja marzeń Mickiewicza o kobiecie-bohaterze" (Emilia Plater as the Embodiment of Mickiewicz's Dreams of a Female Hero), the actual Romantic tragedy was not the story of the fictional Grażyna, but the story of Emilia Plater:

> The real figure of the girl who stands up to fight with weapon in hand at the head of an insurgent unit, joins the uprising, fights, wins or loses with her eyes on the great vision of liberation; she overcomes her own weaknesses and is not flustered by anything. She finally reaches the threshold, unaware of the terrible outcome: the fall of the uprising. She refuses to put down her weapon, turns, breaks through and ultimately dies of exhaustion, of despair and the deepest heartbreak, the most painful kind, which she cannot endure.[40]

38 Also mentioned, though much less frequently, is Anna Henryka Pustowójtówna (aka Michał Smok), a famous January Uprising fighter and aide-de-camp to Gen. Marian Langiewicz.

39 Dioniza Wawrzykowska-Wierciochowa, *Sercem i orężem ojczyźnie służyły. Emilia Plater i inne uczestniczki powstania listopadowego 1830–1831* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Ministerstwa Obrony Narodowej, 1982), p. 247.

40 Ibid., p. 248. See also Stefania Skwarczyńska, "Emilja Plater jako realizacja marzeń Mickiewicza o kobiecie-bohaterze," *Bluszcz*, 49 (1932), p. 7.

It is therefore no wonder that in the 19th century Plater became the focus of a great many works of poetry, biography, and drama in Poland and throughout Europe, as well as a figure exploited by a number of female con artists and political agents claiming to be the exiled heroine.[41] Quickly entombed in a patriotic role, Emilia Plater became the blueprint not only for Polish women rebels fighting in the January Uprising but also for women soldiers in World War I. Contributing significantly to the proliferation of her myth were paintings, especially the famous 1904 work by Wojciech Kossak titled *Emilia Plater w potyczce pod Szawlami* (Emilia Plater in a Skirmish at Szawle). During the war she was the subject of many articles and leaflets[42] retelling the posthumously contrived heroic tale about the preeminent—as Maria Janion writes—"heroine of sorrow."[43] World War I was also a time of the revival of Mickiewicz's poem *Śmierć porucznika* [The Death of the Colonel], which became the lyrics to a popular folk song.[44] However, we cannot be certain if "Mickiewicz's improvisation on Emilia Plater," as Słowacki called it, caught on among the people to the melody that the poet had envisioned for it. This is indeed a pity because as Antoni Odyniec claims, Mickiewicz wanted his ballad to be sung to the melody of the aria from *The Marriage of Figaro*, "Non più andrai," the subject of which is the transformation of the page Cherubino, a young boy with a feminine face of "rosy, girl-like cheeks" and "a striking air" dressed in "fine plumes [and a] soft and stylish hat," into a warrior who "in place of the fandango" is destined for:

41 See for example Wawrzykowska-Wierciochowa, *Sercem i orężem ojczyźnie służyły*, pp. 250–56.

42 Articles on Emilia Plater appeared in *Iskra* in 1914 and *Na posterunku* no. 9 (1915) and no. 48 (1917), among others.

43 Maria Janion, "Kobieta-Rycerz," in Janion *Kobiety i duch inności* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Sic!, 1996), p. 78–101.

44 See Wawrzykowska-Wierciochowa, *Sercem i orężem ojczyźnie służyły*, p. 265.

A gun on [his] shoulder
A sabre at [his] side
A march through the mud
Through the snow and burning sun
[With] shells and canons
Making [his] ears ring.[45]

So, Emilia Plater as Cherubino? The young angel with a girlish face making a return in the women soldiers of the Great War? There is much to support this. Imagery of women fighting in men's armor as angels began to appear during the November Uprising, before *The Death of the Colonel* was even written. This was expressed in the poetry of the poet soldier Konstanty Gaszyński after he heard of the activity of Emilia Plater and her second aide-de-camp, Maria Raszanowicz:

Adorned with the blossom of youth, ornate with charm
Two heroines lead men into battle.
Does God, for whom the fight for freedom is so dear
Send His angels to the aid of the gallant rebels?
And arm their holy hands with the sword of salvation
Like He did the Maid of Orleans in the service of France?[46]

Gaszyński takes his comparison of women in men's armor to angels ever farther as he recalls the great European myth of Joan of Arc, whom the Archangel Michael, surrounded with a guard of angels, compelled to travel to France in aid of the king, and whom the people welcomed as an angel in 1429 as she entered Orleans on a white horse with a flag in her hand.[47] And thus, spurred on by the intertwined threads of myth, the female

45 Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, *The Marriage of Figaro*, Libretto.
46 In Wawrzykowska-Wierciochowa, *Sercem i orężem służyły ojczyźnie*, p. 110.
47 See F. J. Holzwarth, *Historia powszechna*, vol. V0., *Wieki Średnie. Wieki XIV i XV i Czasy przejścia od Wieków Średnich do dziejów nowożytnych* (Warsaw: Przegląd Katolicki, 1883), pp. 318–28. www.ultramontes.pl/Dziewica_Orleanska.htm.

soldier underwent a process of identity regulation or even auto-regulation. In fact such patterns go back even further; predating and, perhaps to a certain extent, informing the decision of women to join the army disguised as men. On the one hand, due to the religious portrayals of angels, Joan acquired the status of a gender-less entity—an emissary of God; but on the other hand the female body concealed beneath the men's attire became the body of a young boy with gentle features. Fighting women have been depicted by a range of iconographic angels, ranging from God's knights to cherubs, ephebes, and delicate boys. The transgression of cultural gender norms that occurred when a woman joined the army in the 19th century eventually found a foothold in literary narratives, a process that was aided by the occasional depiction of men as angels, and therefore as genderless beings.

The strength of the World War I-era woman knight myth, growing ever more complicated and compounded throughout the 19th century, can be seen in the peculiar disintegration of the image of Kazik Żuchowicz from the person of Wanda Gertz. Quite telling seem the words of one of her friends, who, planning an act of opposition to the removal of women from frontline duty, wrote: "Our eyes firmly on Kazik, whose boyish figure resembles something out of a Grottger painting, we fervently devised our memorial."[48] Thus even those women who at the threshold of World War I identified a real political significance in the possibility of fighting on the frontlines—the transformation of women into citizens with rights equal to those of men—became figures orbiting within a phantasmatic space, suspended somewhere between Mickiewicz's literature and Grottger's art. The brutal collision with the postwar reality must have been all the more painful when, in 1921, all female

48 Nowakowska, *Wanda Gertz. Opowieść o kobiecie żołnierzu*, p. 17.

legionnaires were dismissed from military duty. These were women who had dedicated their lives to serving the nation.[49]

The female legionnaires themselves had a strong impact on the myth of the woman knight by adopting the national liberation rhetoric that accompanied the Great War, and often alluding to the Polish tradition of uprisings in their recollections. Maria Rychterówna described the room she was assigned to during her shooting-squad training as an "insurgent's quarters,"[50] and Janina Antoniewiczówna described her involvement in the war as a "mark etched in stone, an unwavering need to keep the faith and a strong sense of obligation as a sacred inheritance from our heroes …"[51] Zofia Zawiszanka wrote about her pre-war love "for old Polish books from the uprisings era," about "studying the military aspects of the 1863 uprising," and about "love and honor" and the "feverish impatience" with which she studied the "bloody traces left behind by forebears on the road from slavery—interpreting in them faint signs of the art of war, the only art that can reinstate the people's independence."[52] Many of them, including Wanda Gertz, also mentioned their fathers fighting in the January Uprising, grandfathers in the November Uprising, or great-grandfathers in the Napoleonic Wars, which inadvertently reinforced the patriarchal claim to the tradition. Serving as a significant point of reference was yet another figure of a woman soldier: Anna Henryka Pustowójtówna, the famous aide-de-camp of General Marian Langiewicz. This heroine was revived in the collective memory a decade earlier in Jerzy Żuławski's drama *Dyktator* (The Dictator), which premiered on January 22, 1903, the fortieth anniversary of the January Uprising, at the Municipal Theater in Lviv, starring the period's most

49 See ibid.

50 Maria Rychterówna, "Nasz oddział macierzysty we Lwowie," in *Wierna służba*, p. 10.

51 Janina Antoniewiczowna, "Zaprzysiężenie," in *Wierna służba*, p. 34

52 Zofia Zawiszanka, "Pierwsze czasy drużyn strzeleckich w Krakowie," in *Wierna służba*, pp. 35–36.

famous acting couple, with Ludwik Solski as Langiewicz and Irena Solska as Pustowótówna (the choice to cast the famed acting couple adding its own melodramatic subtext). Though Żuławski promised to bring, in the vein of Stanisław Wyspiański, "to the painted boards of the theatre / phantasms dug up from the grave" and show them in the manner of an "old comedy" that would allow a "sober grandson" to laugh at the "old-timers' lunacy,"[53] the "four acts of the bloody days of 1863" based solely on a romantic plot in the end painted a picture of Polish history that was utterly conventional in terms of national and gender identity.

The insinuation of the tradition of the January Uprising on the discourse surrounding World War I—bolstered by a variety of cultural spectacles, from theatre plays to national ceremonies—constructed for contemporary audiences a narrative of the early phase of the war as yet another national revolt. The commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the beginning of the January Uprising on the eve of the outbreak of the World War I surely strengthened this impression, as it reinforced the Polish tradition of independence movements and, likewise, the importance of women's involvement in the war. An interesting example of this revolutionary frame informing the perception of the World War I is a pamphlet titled *Polki 1863* (Polish Women of 1863), written in 1916 by Henryk Wierciński on the "53rd anniversary of the January Uprising in aid of the victims of the current war."[54] Published on the seventieth anniversary, meanwhile, was Maria Bruchnalska's *Ciche bohaterki* (Quiet Heroines), in which the author points out that it was common knowledge that women were fighting with weapons in hand, though they were considered "highly eccentric personages

53 Jerzy Żuławski, *Dyktator: prolog i cztery akty z krwawych dni 1863 r.*, 2nd ed. (Lviv: Księgarnia H. Altenberga, 1907), pp. 5, 6.
54 Henryk Wierciński, *Polki 1863 r.* (Lublin: Ziemiańska, 1916).

Fig. 21: Theater company of the Ochotnicza Legia Kobiet (Women's Volunteer League) in Lviv, 1918–1920.

who disturbed the normal order of the world."[55] Therefore it is no wonder that the names and surnames of real historical fighting women (other than the mythologized Plater and Pustowójtówna), that is, the female participants in the November and January Uprisings, although they were the symbolic mothers of radical involvement in warfare, remain largely unknown today. Yet in the cases of both uprisings, we can speak of women's involvement on a mass scale, of a collective participation of Polish women in 19th-century independence movements that had no precedence in all of Europe.

A unique and rather extreme case in the history of women soldiers discussed here is that of Zofia Trzcińska-Kamińska (aka Zygmunt Tarło), who appears in neither the two-volume anthology of memoirs of female independence fighters nor in historian Joanna Dufrat's publication on women in leftist independence circles. The memory of Kamińska's short-lived stint

55 Bruchnalska, *Ciche bohaterki*, p. 201.

Fig. 22: Theater company of the Ochotnicza Legia Kobiet (Women's Volunteer League) in Lviv, 1918–1920.

in the army, however, lives on in the written testimony of a man. We know of her frontline experience from the accounts of her husband, Zygmunt Kamiński, a painter and cofounder and professor of the Architecture Faculty of the Warsaw University of Technology. From the perspective of her conservative husband, Zofia's departure for the war in September 1915 was a scandalous matter, both socially and politically. To fight on the frontlines, Kamińska left her husband, her parents, and her four-year-old daughter. Moreover, in joining the Polish Legions she betrayed the political stance of her milieu; the gentry, after all, rejected Piłsudski as a socialist doing the bidding of the Prussians while unanimously supporting the pro-Russian platform of Roman Dmowski, which would have meant the forfeiture of Polish autonomy.

In Zofia's intent to join the 1st Uhlan Regiment of the 1st Brigade, Kamiński initially identified a motivation rooted in the "picturesque ruins" of Polish identity preserved in art and literature cultivating the national liberation myth. Yet he writes

about her decision to become an uhlan in a rather ironic tone: "Endowing the uhlans with a certain charm was their uniform, which effectively combined the color of the Austrian *feldgrau* with traditional forms worn by the uhlans of Prince Józef and later, in the years 1815–1831. Particularly handsome was the tall uhlan's cap."[56] Zygmunt succumbed to the temptation to immortalize in writing the adventures of the legion cavalry and recorded the experiences of his wife as she courageously followed in the footsteps of Emilia Plater. He goes on to say:

> I regret that the absence of documentation, correspondence and notes from the period forces me to rely exclusively on oral history-based narration provided by my wife, who spoke of her adventures in the war with brevity, rarely and reluctantly. For that reason, there may be inconsistencies in things like the names of places and their orientation, as is always the case when one must resort to memory unsubstantiated by factual materials.[57]

"A handful of details on Zofia's ordeals on the front lines," which the author considers to be a kind of "deviation from the accepted rule of not writing about events not witnessed personally," very quickly morphs into an account of the author's own unrealized desires. In narrating the story, Kamiński appropriates the frontline experiences of his own wife, which becomes evident in a moving description of Zygmunt's fate on the frontlines in Wołyń in September and October 1915:

> Villages partially burned out and peppered with smoldering embers, their citizenry cowering in the nooks among rowdy foreign troops, amidst the tumult of marches, campsites, trench-digging, maneuvers, curses, cruel commandeering, looting, soldiers foraging for food and

56 Zygmunt Kamiński, *Dzieje życia w pogoni za sztuką* (Warsaw: Instytut Wydawniczy PAX, 1975), p. 565.
57 Ibid., p. 569.

> supplies, the noise of shots and alarms, brutal scenes of terror, and finally, fear and hunger all around; these are cursory glances of the frontline reality.[58]

When he finally recalls the battlefield after a murderous clash, he suddenly becomes Zygmunt Tarło, a soldier who was there, keeping a typical World War I soldier's journal, trying to convey in an intense multisensual account the horrific experience of a landscape of ruins:

> Not a single living human being—silence and oblivion. Among the many scattered corpses of Russian and German troops there emerge a dozen or so dogs, which forage among the bodies, growling, their tails between their legs and their hackles raised. [...] The stiff, pale soldier's corpses strewn in disarray, struck dead in the heat of battle. Some have their hands stretched upwards, frozen as if in a gesture of begging the heavens for mercy. Blood runs profusely from the gashed throat of a young soldier, coagulated into a sort of monstrous, blueish-purple stubble. The blackened faces of the soldiers twinkle with vacant eyes agape in a final horror.[59]

The husband's sudden and uncontrolled hijacking of his wife's experiences, which allows him to vicariously experience what he longed for but was never able to experience himself, becomes a momentary suspension of culturally dictated objectivity. His transformation into a medium for an Other's history (that is, his wife's) constitutes a total antithesis of the fear of femininity that permeates this story, or rather the fear of society recognizing the author's inadequate fulfillment of the template of a real man, that is, a soldier. Kamiński feels strangely dejected by the fact that people will "attribute the role of a 'reservist' in trousers [to him], a role that is not very flattering to

58 Ibid., p. 571.
59 Ibid., p. 581.

personal ambition."[60] There is also his envy for the uniformed body, especially in the fragment where the author goes on and on listing the names of artists "parading around in legion uniforms": Juliusz Kaden-Bandrowski, Władysław Orkan, Wacław Sieroszewski, Adolf Nowaczyński, Leon Wyczółkowski, and, finally, Adam Dobrodzicki, Leopold Gottlieb, Karol Maszkowski, Mikołaj Szyszłowski, and many others, the "sons of Apelles" who fought on the front lines.

This envy for the uniformed body eventually escalates into a form of symbolic violence towards his wife, as seen in the passage describing the ritual transformation in which Zofia becomes Zygmunt Tarło. Portraying her identity transition as an idiotic woman's cabaret, Kamiński diminishes and undermines his wife's personal decision to become a soldier:

> Now all that remained was a concern about the necessary supplies: uniform, jackboots, uhlan's cap, undergarments, etc. Assisted by Nuna, Zofia nimbly got down to business. She began running to various stores, tailors and shoemakers in Lublin. The matter of achieving the correct appearance was addressed by a hairdresser's skilled hand. My wife's beautiful golden hair fell victim to the scissors. […] The shaving of her head with a razor down to the skin radically put the matter to rest.[61]

Becoming apparent in Kamiński's account is one other side of the "woman soldier in disguise"—as a figure essentially created by the male mind, accepted and controlled by men, and thus *de facto* functioning as an element of the patriarchal army system. Painted somewhat differently, meanwhile, is the less evident and less mythologized persona of the male soldier in drag—the male soldier playing a woman's role in amateur frontline theatre. Such figures pop up in a range of text and

60 Ibid., p. 567.
61 Ibid., p. 566.

visual documents from the First World War, and appear to have no precedence in earlier Polish struggles for national independence. This representational disproportion in the real and symbolic spheres also suggests that the entry of the woman into the realm of male violence, that is, war, was considerably less taboo than the appearance of a man, specifically a soldier, in a state of bodily fluidity and cultural gender ambiguity.

War Antiheroes

From September 5 to November 30, 2014 at the Schwules Museum (Queer Museum) in Berlin, to mark the centenary of the outbreak of World War I, art historian Anke Vetter put together the exhibition *Mein Kamerad – Die Diva. Theater an der Front und in Gefangenenlagern des Ersten Weltkriegs* (My Comrade—The Diva. Theatre on the Front Lines and at the Internment Camps of the First World War). In it the curator presented a vast selection of visual materials relating to the phenomenon of men playing female roles in German frontline theatre in the years 1914 to 1920, the great majority of which come from a collection established shortly after the war and conscientiously expanded during the interwar period by the Cologne-based theatre historian Carl Niessen. A part of this collection appeared in a 1927 exhibition of German theatre (Deutsche Theater-Ausstellung) in Magdeburg, Germany, curated by a student of Niessen's, Hermann Pörzgen, who in the 1930s produced two systematic studies on the subject: *Theater ohne Frau* (Women-less Theatre) and *Theater als Waffengattung* (Theatre as a Kind of Weapon).[62] Both Niessen's collection and Pörzgen's publications were the

62 See Hermann Pörzgen, *Theater ohne Frau. Das Bühnenleben der Kriegsgefangenen Deutschen 1914–1920* (Berlin: Königsberg Pr., 1933); and Hermann Pörzgen, *Theater als Waffengattung. Das deutsche Fronttheater im Weltkrieg 1914 bis 1920* (Frankfurt am Main: Societats–Verlag, 1935).

impetus for presenting these fascinating theatre photographs, playbills, and programs to the contemporary public through the *My Comrade—The Diva* exhibition and text anthologies, mainly by German theatre and cultural scholars specializing in phenomena linking theatre and the First World War, such as Britta Lange, Julia B. Köhne, and Eva Krivanec.[63] Though the authors' articles tend to focus on soldier-actors and German prisoners, their conclusions leave no uncertainty that frontline theatres were an "international phenomenon, which from 1914 unfolded behind the scenes of the 'modern' and highly mechanized war, which like no other war in history left such an unimaginable number of captured, wounded and killed soldiers."[64] The placement of simulated femininity at the center of reflection by scholars like Pörzgen results from the fact that the appearance of cross-dressed men had been acknowledged, even at the time, as a fundamental factor in the success of theatres operating during World War I:

> The activity of the "ladies" reveals the deepest and most accurate significance of wartime theatre. It fully encompassed that which legitimizes the scenes, which makes it possible to see the important and necessary phenomena, and which endows it with a highly ethical value: the joy and happiness resulting from illusion.[65]

Pörzgen sees the figure of the "diva" so central to frontline theatre as a symptom of the "disappearing image of women," which in the confines of the masculinized space of war could be replicated only in theatre and through theatre.

63 See Julia B. Köhne, Britta Lange, Anke Vetter, eds., *Mein Kamerad – die Diva. Theater an der Front und in Gefangenenlagern des Ersten Weltkriegs* (Berlin: Schwules Museum, Munich: edition text+kritik, 2014).

64 Anke Vetter, "Eine Einführung," in *Mein Kamerad – die Diva*, p. 12.

65 Pörzgen, *Theater ohne Frau*, p. 79.

> They [frontline theatres] recreated the disappearing picture of women, doing so even when women were unavailable, when men played women. The war arena was an arena for performances in which male actors played women.[66]

In these stage recreations and their transferal of femininity, wartime theatre at the same time underwent a unique recoding. It unveiled a repressed contradiction to the prevailing military discourse: instead of all-male actors portraying the courageous and steadfast male warrior, some were presenting themselves as alluring and seductive women.[67]

It is almost impossible to imagine a similar exhibition in contemporary Poland. It would be very difficult to find any museum in Poland that could host an exhibition accompanied by historical-cultural debate on the subject of legionnaires who, in their time away from combat, transformed themselves into women using lipstick and costumes as well as voice and movement techniques to render them "female." Such conscientiousness and dedication of male soldiers in their assumption of female roles, as captured in the photographs, today not only stimulates reflection on the pursuit of perfection in creating stage illusion but also raises questions on the role played by gender performance in the process of identity formation. It undermines the male military stereotype, pointing out the danger of an anti-heroic attitude to war. Certain visual motifs in particular, like embracing or kissing couples, divas posing for pictures, transvestite soldiers, and male dancers often have homoerotic or homosexual connotations on account of the wartime landscape being an expanse of male isolation. Such connotations,

66 Ibid., p. 77.

67 See Julia B. Köhne and Britta Lange, "Die Illusionsmaschine Damenimitation in Front- und Gefangenentheatern des Ersten Weltkriegs," in *Mein Kamerad – die Diva*, p. 37.

however, have no place in Polish cultural memory, certainly not in this memory that cultivates the legend of the Polish Legions.

It is worthwhile, however, to point out that, in addition to being popular with general audiences during World War I, Polish frontline theatres were also, albeit in a lesser degree, of interest to military scholars. Remigiusz Kwiatkowski wrote about the emancipatory dimension of the figure of the soldier-actor in his article "Wojsko i sztuka" (The Army and Art) written shortly after the war: "The connection of army and art is something extremely welcome and desirable, especially in a democratic army, where the soldier is permitted to be a citizen."[68] Thus, doing theatre, the Polish soldier was allowed to be a citizen even while a soldier. World War I serves as a crucial example of the influence of theatre on those needs and rights because—as writes the only historian specializing in Polish military theatre, Stanisław Piekarski—it was during this war that military theatre emerged and that the first Polish military theatre groups were established.[69] In 1919 Henryk Cepnik, the future director of the Polish theatres in Vilnius and Stanisławowo, even wrote:

> Never had theatre been more materially successful, never had they enjoyed such great attendance as during this war. Our future historians will have an extremely interesting task as they examine the causes and foundations of this unheard-of spike in the interest of the war-weary public in all forms of performance, especially theatre plays. Yet this interest was not limited only to the so-called "hinterland" but, interestingly, also gripped the soldiers fighting on the front lines. The

68 Remigiusz Kwiatkowski, "Wojsko i sztuka," in *Polska Zbrojna* no. 4, January 4, (1925), p. 2.

69 See Stanisław Piekarski, *Polskie teatry żołnierskie 1915–1939* (Warsaw: MON, 1999), p. 18. Though at the beginning of the 19th century Prince Józef Poniatowski had already enlisted Wojciech Bogusławski to organize plays for soldiers, these were still performances given by civilian actors.

> war generated a hitherto unseen and unknown type of military theatre functioning in direct proximity to the battle lines.[70]

The theatre activity boom during World War I was connected, on the one hand, with the large numbers of enlisted artists and intellectuals and, on the other, with the specifics of modern warfare, which relied on interminable placement of soldiers in trenches that took on the character of primitive underground dwellings for the men who lived in them, sometimes for months at a time. "Under such circumstances, the war became the everyday for soldiers, and they had to do something to 'not go mad.'"[71] The war bred a specific kind of vitality—after all, even in the trenches there was ordinary life, an inhabited world, with its denizens attempting to bring structure to their existence. There was an external drive to get by in extreme conditions. The theatre was art but also a form of collective therapy, and it was one of the most popular means of letting off steam in traumatic circumstances.

During the war there were many professional theatre companies that set out to the frontlines for the sake of Polish soldiers, one example being the Krakow-based theatre of Wiktor Biegański. There was also no shortage of stage artists in the ranks, such as the young set designer Iwo Gall, who ran a Polish field theatre in Eastern Galicia in 1917, or the outstanding actor Karol Adwentowicz, who, in the spring of 1915, after convalescing in a Vienna hospital following a terrible fall from a horse, became the artistic director of the Vienna Legions Theatre under the auspices of the Supreme National Committee. Deserving of particular attention are the amateur theatres set up by soldiers for soldiers. As totally inclusive theatre groups, they constituted the most radical form of stage company. Composed entirely of amateur soldier actors, they were regarded

70 Henryk Cepnik, "Teatr żołnierski," *Placówka* no. 12, April 20 (1919), p. 21.
71 Piekarski, *Polskie teatry żołnierskie 1915–1939*, p. 18.

with a sense of ownership among the army ranks and staff. They were also the most spontaneous kind of stage outfit, often—in the spur of the moment—taking over ruins, trenches, cellars, or underground bunkers to serve as performance spaces.

This "grassroots" perspective dominates the founding myth of the 1st Legion Brigade Theatre, the original permanent frontline theatre. One of its actors recalled years later:

> We were lying in reserve, living in tents fortified with dirt. Those who cleverly combined their below-ground work with above-ground work, like for instance putting their tent over a suitable pit, had even rather comfortable homes (sometimes even with stoves). Arising in just such a dwelling one autumn day in 1916 was a plan to put on a show. The first battalion was already famous for its shows by then. Actually not so much for shows as for the productions of Lolek Voizé, being improvised when we were still in Kęty and on the Nida River. This time, though, the plan was to form a real theatre, a cabaret, with a stage, programs, and the whole works.[72]

Another group of mythical stature was the Sara Bernhardt Field Theatre of the 16th Regiment of the National Defense Infantry, which had to find shelter in the woods after its original synagogue venue was destroyed by Russian artillery. This "underground" theatre, however, could accommodate an impressive audience of 300, and was equipped with a large stage, a dressing room, lights, and even a film projector, probably "the only one in use so close to the frontlines."[73] As time went by, these amateur theatres became more and more sophisticated in their activity, which saw the relocation of the performance space to elevated and roofed stages and the placement of the audience in the open air, where much larger groups

72 Roman Woynicz-Horoszkiewicz, "Jak to było w Legjonach. Wspomnienia starego strzeca Romana Woynicz-Horoszkiewicza," in *Strzelec* no. 21 (1932), p. 17.
73 Piekarski, *Polskie teatry żołnierskie*, p. 39.

could gather. Theatres were given not only dedicated spaces and proper names but also their very own "stewards," as was the case with the aforementioned Lolek Voize, real name Karol Voise, who quickly rose to become the director of the 1st Legion Brigade Theatre, transforming it into the Auxiliary Corps Theatre after a few performances in the woods.[74]

Voise's theatre pulled in throngs of soldiers by specializing in current events and satire, favoring what was known as legion humor, characterized by blunt and often vulgar jokes, crude gags, and a liberal use of expletives. This specific trench humor was in fact already commonplace in popular legionnaire ditties—obviously not those belonging to the patriotic cannon, which were preserved after the war in published song books like *My, Pierwsza Brygada* (We, the First Brigade) or *Jak to na wojence ładnie* (It's So Nice in Our Little War)—but rather those in unofficial circulation. Among the champions of what Bakhtin would later refer to as "bodily-material degradation" was Bolesław Wieniawa-Długoszowski. This officer in the 1st Legion Brigade, known for his love of women and alcohol, even composed a legionnaire song consisting exclusively of expletives and vulgarisms.[75] Though legion humor was not solely responsible for the unique character of frontline theatre, it was indeed an integral part of it. Frontline theatre productions tended to have a cabaret structure, composed of a series of numbers: an introduction by a master of ceremonies, song and dance routines, acrobatic or even circus acts, sketches, vocalized sound effects mimicking explosions, military life anecdotes, and quasi-scientific readings. The foremost personality of the cabarets was Adolf Porębski, a

74 Of course, the theatre stayed close to the regiment, moving with it from Wołyń to Baranovichy, and then on to Łomża, Zambrów, Lublin, and Modlin, from where, after the Oath Crisis in 1917 (Kryzys przysięgowy 1917, a World War I political conflict between the Imperial German Army and the Polish Legions), it found itself in San Fior di Sotto, Italy.

75 See Bolesław Wieniawa-Długoszowski, "Moje piosenki," in *Muzyka* no. 5–7 (1935), special edition.

"trench-fauna researcher" in the legions. Soon, however, the format evolved to include frontline drama—"current stage antics,"[76] as they were sometime called—custom written for specific actors specializing in particular character types or roles, who over subsequent performances developed their unique stage personas.

When the Auxiliary Corps Theatre was taken over in late 1916 by the former middle-school teacher Michał Lewicki, who composed the songs and sketches in addition to singing and dancing himself, the troupe began to be referred to as a "soldier's balagan theatre."

> It is hard not to notice the connection to Błok's *Buda Jarmarczna* (Fair Stall), despite all of the differences, or—speaking more cautiously—with the day's fascination with naïve art, which looked back to old farce and is related to silent film comedies through its distance to the real world, the intuitiveness of its cognition, the sensuality of its presentation and its openness to imagination, for which nothing is impossible.[77]

The 1st Brigade Theatre inherited from prewar cabarets one other important feature—its extensive play with gender and roleplaying, which would have been impossible anywhere beyond the frontline stage. No longer were men just playing women's roles out of necessity; gender itself became the subject of the performances. Even the playbills featured specific information about the artists onstage being of "genders for which the theatre's management 'will not be accountable.'"[78] Enjoying an especially strong following was the theatre's "lead dancer," Adam Drabik, who, as Roman Horoszkiewicz writes, was "adored by the Prussian officers,"[79] and regarded in certain ways as a Polish Isadora Duncan in his wig and white bedsheet.

76 See Roman Woynicz-Horoszkiewicz, "Teatr w lesie," in *W pierwszym pułku. Notatki legjonisty* (Warsaw: Wojskowy Instytut Naukowo-Oświatowy, 1935), p. 91.
77 Ratajczakowa, *Obrazy narodowe w dramacie i teatrze*, p. 336.
78 Michał Lewicki, *Legon w niebie* (self-pub., Warsaw, 1933), p. 16.
79 Woynicz-Horoszkiewicz, "Teatr w lesie," p. 92.

Gender stereotypes were also unexpectedly reenacted and deconstructed in the 16th Regiment Theatre, which took care to foster a Polish-Catholic identity. This company, after all, was consecrated by the field chaplain Jerzy Bukomczyk, and all of its performances ended with the singing of the Polish national anthem and the hymns *Serdeczna Matko* (Beloved Mother) and *Boże, coś Polskę* (God Save Poland). This, however, did not alter the fact that all of the female characters onstage were played by male soldiers, among whom the utmost mastery was achieved by Stanisław Ćwiertnia. Indeed he must have been irresistibly convincing enough in the title role of *Czarna Mańk*a (Black Mańka) for an Austrian officer to host a banquet in honor of the "beautiful Polish actress" after one performance. What is interesting is that, even offstage and out of costume, Ćwiertnia was the woman of the 16th Regiment: "The whole Regiment was in love with her (him) and, for want of other women, they would shower her (him) with candy."[80]

This pattern of theatrical "crossdressing" took on an even more distinct form in theatres organized at POW camps, where not only gender was defied but also national and class identity. Hermann Montanus's 1915 publication *Die Kriegsgefangenen in Deutschland* contains 212 photographs documenting life in German prison camps, many of which attest to just how important amusement was for the men there, ranging from musical concerts (especially prominent in camps for officers), to sports (gymnastics, running, soccer, and even tennis), games (croquet, lotto, chess, cards), folk dances (especially among Russian POWs), and the ubiquitous frontline theatre.[81] The Polish Army Museum Archive possesses playbills from a theatre operating in

80 Piekarski, *Polskie teatry żołnierskie*, p. 40.

81 *Die Kriegsgefangenen in Deutschland. Gegen 250 Wirklichkeitsaufnahmen aus deutschen Gefangenenlagern mit einer Erläuterung von Professor Dr. Backahaus. In deutscher, französischer, englischer, spanischer und russischer Sprache* (Siegen: Verlag Hermann Montanus, 1915), pp. 19–21.

an Austrian POW camp for Russian officers in Theresienstadt,[82] which demonstrate the degree to which wartime theatres were places where the patriotic/national discourse was moot and where communities formed independently of the real political situation. The Russian officers interned here created theatre for other prisoners of war, including Polish soldiers in the Russian army, and for the Austrian guards. It is not entirely clear what language they used in the performances—the playbills were written in German or, occasionally, Polish. It would be safe to presume that the officers' education allowed them also to put on plays in the language of the enemy. There is no doubt, however, that the theatre in Theresienstadt offered a truly unique repertoire. Here it was not cabaret numbers that ruled the stage but dramas and adaptations of Russian literature, such as *The Lower Depths*, by Maxim Gorky, *The Government Inspector* and *Marriage*, by Nikolai Gogol, one-act plays by Chekhov, and various writings of Arkady Averchenko. The officers ostensibly chose plays that criticized the Russian national administration and the social class that most of them likely belonged to—denouncing petit bourgeois ambitions and the conformity of the intelligentsia and the bourgeoisie. They occasionally put on dramas that addressed the issue of manual labor in factories and the life of laborers, such as *The Unemployed*, by Zofia Biełoj. By portraying a wide range of people from various Russian social classes, they carried out on foreign soil a type of re-iteration of their national identity—one that, given the circumstances, had to have been presented as a historical construct. Likewise, gender functioned as a cultural construct. The theatre in the Theresienstadt POW camp maintained the practice of casting certain actors exclusively in female parts. Such a distinction was held

82 Located there during the World War I was a prisoner-of-war camp, mainly for Russians but also for Serbs, Italians, and Romanians.

by one M. Marsuvanov,[83] who at one time or another played every possible female type: Popova in Chekhov's *The Bear*, the model Marusia in Averchenko's *Bohemia*, the stepdaughter Marta in one of Tolstoy's comedies, the high-school girl Mania in a play written by the POWs titled *Starving Don Juan*, as well as a plethora of wives, daughters, and mistresses.

What appears to be the most telling case among such phenomena—one that offered a certain critical/ironic metacommentary on the exceptional state within an exceptional state that was theatre in the time of World War I—is the play *Legun w niebie* (Legionnaire in Heaven), written and directed by Michał Lewicki.[84] This play by the Auxiliary Corps Theatre, first performed on July 21, 1917, also happens to be the most frequently performed of all the amateur productions by frontline theatres during the War. And it was not only because the premiere occurred on the day of Józef Piłsudski's arrest in Magdeburg and was halted as soon as news reached Modlin. Lewicki's play deeply undermined the Polish discourse on independence and the legitimacy of war in general, specifically war's ideological dimension, which negated an individual's right to physical existence. Lewicki recalled the origin of *Legun* many years later:

> Awaiting a decision from Granddad [Piłsudski], which was to determine our fate, we consumed the famed Besseler soup, whose chief nutritional constituent were potato peels embellished with fat of a puzzling taste and fragrance, the analysis of which revealed a large proportion of "helden lard" (as our legion chemists/veterinarians claimed).[85]

83 Sadly, it has proved impossible thus far to ascertain the actor's full name. All of the theatre programs from the Theresienstadt camp, found at the Polish Army Museum in Warsaw, contain only his surname and first initial.

84 The play's title appears interchangeably as *Legun* and *Legon w niebie* in the repertoire.

85 Lewicki, *Legon w niebie*, p. 13.

Fig. 23: A ticket to the theater in a POW camp in Theresienstadt.

The play thus concerns unheroic legionnaires—ones who perished not on the front lines but in the so-called hinterland in bloody encounters with soldiers of allied forces while on their way to neighboring villages for milk, bread, or tobacco. Stories of legionnaires like these, a poor fit for the national-liberation myth, were the crux of Lewicki's tale. In the play it was these very soldiers who made it to heaven to be cared for by the "heavenly nurses," St. Magda and St. Zita; and by the representative of the Regency Council, St. Łazik; and the National Democrat, St. Petey, who formed in this theatrical heaven a "branch office" of the Polish Legions, the Women's League, and the Polish Red Cross.[86] Lewicki's tragi-comedy was presented in the convention of an operetta, which allowed the author to create an unprecedented genre—*operobujda*, an "opera tall tale."[87]

86 See ibid., p. 14.
87 It was a play's subtitle. Ibid., p. 1.

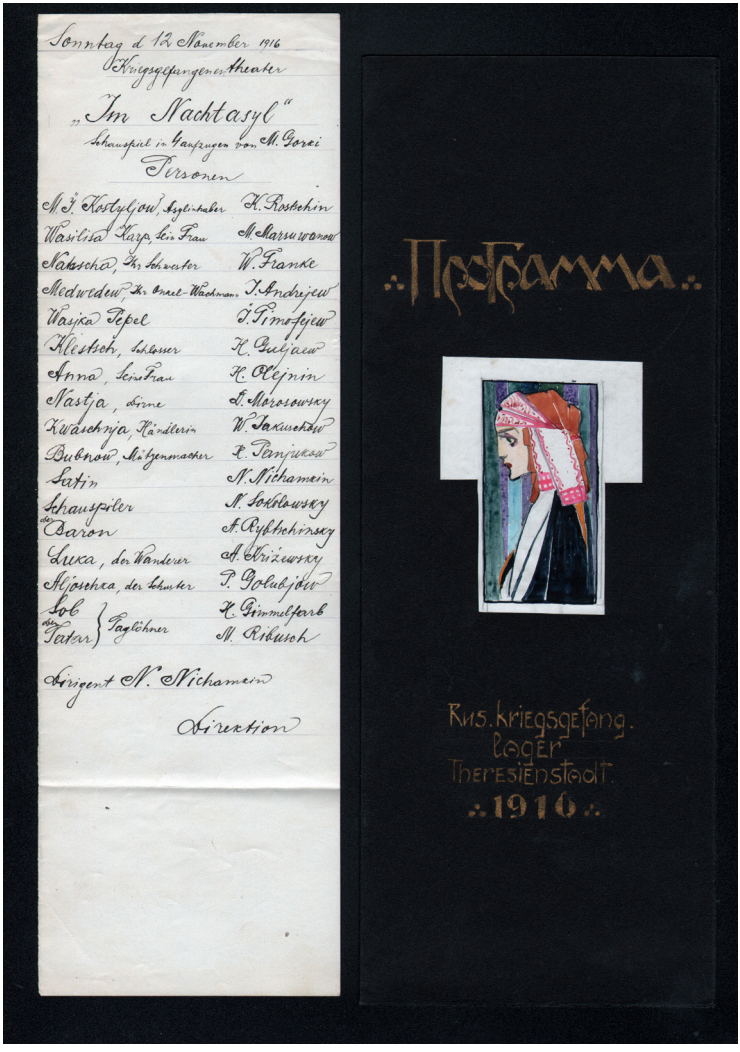

Fig. 24: A theater program from the Theresienstadt POW camp.

Legionnaire in Heaven also exhibits an interesting link between the subject of erasing and encroaching on military and sexual identity and figures of saints and angels. Writing about his heroes and heroines years later, Lewicki admitted that he had adapted the characters to the individual predispositions and abilities of the actors, and not the other way around. Miss Edith Condoni, "our slender tart, our prima-ballerina," was played by the actor who specialized in ultra-feminine roles and could replicate various styles of dancing, Adam Drabik, "our classic imitator of Isadora Duncan's dancing, who likewise in this part devised meticulous female ballet variations as only he could."[88] The legionnaire was played by Zbigniew Orwicz "with mangy pathos which guaranteed entry into [...] the conservative heaven." Lewicki entrusted the role of the winged Cherub to set designer Zygmunt Grabowski, who rather resembled a "heavyweight beau" instead of a boy with wings. Finally, the role of St. Magda, in love with the legionnaire and representing "the era's patriotic Polish virgins and matrons,"[89] he took for himself—making him the author, director, and an actor in the play, as well as a soldier of the Polish Legions, who by then had already "knocked-off the role of a suspect virgin conduit"[90] in other frontline theatre performances. Thus all of the legionnaires—all peculiar "oddballs" playing out a private theatre in the political drama that was the Great War—found their place in this theatrical heaven, irrespective of gender, political beliefs, religion, or physical characteristics.

After the conclusion of the war, this most famous frontline theatre underwent a certain institutionalization in the Polish-Soviet War of 1919–21. At the time Lewicki's theatre became a touring field theatre, whose mandate was to entertain soldiers during the Polish-Soviet War. In this capacity they resumed

88 Ibid., p. 16.
89 Ibid., p. 14.
90 Ibid., p. 16.

traditional gender roles in performance, and it is in this form that Lewicki's theatre appears in the Polish poet Władysław Broniewski's *Diary* entry for February 7, 1921.[91] During the theatre's visit, Broniewski spontaneously joined in the production, preparing some of the dialogue and "gags on current affairs," which were the main attraction for the officers and which elicited "roaring laughter from the whole room, with the better 'dressed' wanting to beat up the author."[92]

After World War I, no longer performing as an exclusively male cast of amateur actors who played women's roles, the field theatre lost some of its subversiveness. The subversive role was taken over by the theatre of the Ochotnicza Legia Kobiet (Women's Volunteer League), a military organization formed in Lviv in 1919 by Polish women, who by then had already won the legal right to be soldiers and to fight in the Polish-Soviet War. The Women's Volunteer League preserved the idea of military theatre being a stage for gender performance, but in reverse, of course: both male and female characters were played only by women. They developed a broad spectrum of body images and social behaviors, and they created a set of attributes and costumes in order to reveal "femininity" and "masculinity" as social and—especially in the military context—political constructions.

Missing this subversive potential of playing with gender identity, the field theatre organized by the regular (male) army during the Polish-Soviet War did maintain certain characteristic legion features, those which defined the legionnaire's identity: the ever-present drinking and hijinks, humor based on current events, references to specific soldiers, and the use of vulgarity and expletives. Prominent in field theatre were travesties and reenactments of plays performed in the legions during

91 Władysław Broniewski, *Pamiętnik 1918–1922*, selected by and foreword by Wanda Broniewska, ed. Feliksa Lichodziejewska (Warsaw: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1984), pp. 215–223.
92 Ibid.

World War I. The strategy of repetition is especially evident in the play *Legionnaire in Heaven* and Karol Lilienfeld-Krzewski's famous novel *Kapral Szczapa* (Corporal Szczapa), most notably in the story's protagonist—a simple soldier from Galicia, who first enlists in the Austrian army during the war only to later join Piłsudski's legions and rise to become its chief commander. As a legion jester, the Corporal Szczapa character speakes in a peculiar tongue, a mixture of phrases and jargon borrowed from all of the lands of the Polish partitions. His speech, accompanied by a cutting military sense of humor, language, and situational gags, mirrored the historically disintegrated Polish identity, while also serving that identity's performative revitalization, creating a vision of Polishness based on patriotism and loyalty to Piłsudski. This ideologically tinged humor also permeated the later postwar dramatizations of the story of Szczapa's rise, adapted by Krzewski himself. The figure of Corporal Szczapa the jester resonated so strongly with audiences that from its very inception it continued to gain popular and commercial appeal well beyond its initial military audience. Eventually it broke free of its (ideological) blueprint and made its way into numerous plays and even newspaper serials. Deprived of income from these commercial productions, which he believed he was owed as a result of his copyright, Krzewski wrote in the fourth edition of the novel, published in 1930:

> It turned into "national" property, to the extent that to this day there are all sorts of comedies and plays in which the main character is so similar to Corporal Szczapa, like two peas in a pod, ripping him off in broad daylight. There is a newspaper in Pomorze region that still prints "conversations" with Szczapa that are anything but possible. Every so often a Szczapa floats up like a washed up body and torments me instead of tormenting the publishers at night. Bah! In a Vilnius cinema I saw an ad for an upcoming film titled Corporal Szczapa. The ad shows a bearded soldier, an Austrian with a pipe in his mouth, suspended in the air above an exploding grenade. That was Szczapa, in

> this awkward manner probably filling in for the Czech Švejk. It made me want to cry, and I would cry and cry if I thought it would help … There is no rescue for me![93]

There is thus little doubt that the emergence of a specific performative form in the trenches, in which laughter dominated as a means of escape and the body—vulgar, raw, amateurish, thick-skinned, and uncouth—became an expression of the anti-authoritarian spirit, was an exceptionally interesting phenomenon, though one that was difficult to grasp. Amateur frontline theatre functioned as a sort of wartime carnival, a particular expression of freedom, an alternative culture based on laughter that was both the antithesis to and an integral part of the official culture. In his famous paper *Rabelais and His World*, Mikhail Bakhtin argues that the carnival equates to a kind of ritualized rebellion. And while it invites a reversal of the official culture's status quo—men and women swap roles, the "lofty" is debased and "lowly" is revered, people are affected by semantic atrophy, and bodies and objects take on cultural meaning—the outcome is that the existing order is in fact maintained.[94] As Dobrochna Ratajczakowa asserts, "Legionnaire theatre planted the seed of a new dramatic tradition and a new protagonist. That was the legionnaires, a childlike personification of simplicity, original strength, and elementary emotion."[95]

Nonetheless, the tradition of vulgar buffoonery and of the plebeian hero defined by his own corporality underwent a process of fundamental modification in the legionnaire theatre of the interwar years, which became something "virtuous and

93 Karol Krzewski, "Zamiast przedmowy do wydania czwartego," in *Kapral Szczapa* (Krakow: Gebethner i Wolff, 1930), pp. 10–11.

94 Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Hélène Iswolsky, foreword by Krystyna Pomorska, intro. Michael Holquist (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984).

95 Ratajczakowa, *Obrazy narodowe w dramacie i teatrze*, p. 338.

prudish."[96] This is well illustrated by the case of Karol Lilienfeld-Krzewski, who went from being the creator of a legion fool to, after the war, a champion of the legion legend and of Piłsudski himself; his comedies, "spun round a 'homegrown Švejk' retained their lowbrow, farcical character though shed the entire stigma of naive and special-interest theatre."[97] After Poland regained independence, the author of *Corporal Szczapa*, working under the pen-name of Bronisław Bakal, not only produced several stage adaptations of his stories,[98] but also wrote many short-form dramas with patriotic and nationalist themes, so-called legionnaire anecdotes.[99] Krzewski continued his military career in the newly reborn Poland, and was an influential journalist, working with, among other publications, the pro-Piłsudski *Droga*, which in 1929 the communist activist Jan Hempel characterized as emanating:

> The feeling of atrophy and aimlessness in contemporary Polish life. A wistful look into the past to youthful legion raptures and a longing to relive those high and sublime days once more. The expectations of orders to come from who-knows-where and dreams of some deity to whom to devote oneself.[100]

Also losing its vitality was Polish Legion playwriting, which became extremely conventional and whose structure was

96 Ibid., p. 336.
97 Ibid., p. 338.
98 *Jak kapral Szczapa wykiwał śmierć* [How Corporal Szczapa Deodges Death], *Jak kapral Szczapa dostał się do raju* [How Corporal Szczapa Got Into Heaven], *Jak kapral Szczapa kochał Dziadka* [How Corporal Szczapa Loved Granddad].
99 *Serce komendanta* [The Commander's Heart], *Rydz-Śmigły czuwa!* [Rydz-Śmigły Is Watching!], *Szaleńcy* [Madmen], *Szaleni romantycy* [Mad Romantics], *Śmierć Okrzei* [The Death of Okrzeja], *Tupek robi karierę* [Tupek Makes a Career], *Więzień Magdeburga* [The Magdeburg Prisoner], *Morcy ma nos* [Morcy Has a Nose], *Nieznany żołnierz* [Unknown Soldier], *Ciocia protekcja* [Aunt Protection], and *Bitwa pod Łowczówkiem* [The Battle of Łowczówek].
100 Jan Hempel, "Droga," in *Dźwignia* no. 5 (1927), p. 37.

"openly governed by ideology."[101] It became commonplace to borrow motifs from great Romantic and symbolist dramas, which resulted in the repetition of 19th-century symbolism concerning death and resurrection, the cult of graves, and the patriotic imperative of a glorious death for the sake of the homeland, which in independent Poland equated to a mechanical ritual preserving the memory of the Great War as an act of rebellion carried out by the legionnaires. This memorial performance, based on ressentiment, led to the idealization and palpable vulgarization of the vision of theatre proposed by Wyspiański. Even during the war, the author of *Varsovian Anthem* was exploited to reinforce the legend of Piłsudski, who was said to put into practice Wyspiański's supposedly patriotic visions: "Everything that Wyspiański, through his imagination as a national artist, had 'programmed' in his literary and theatrical visions."[102] With this in mind, the remarks of Dobrochna Ratajczakowa seem all the more accurate, asserting that in legionnaire drama:

> We are not dealing with (as in poetry) a display of spiritual connections and kinships, but rather with exposed dramatic-theatrical stereotypes, from which it cannot be liberated. Standing behind legion matters is a fractured and confused vision of great theatre; a scattered mosaic of motifs, tropes, figures, structural maneuvers, and characters drawn from the heap arising in this manner, from the crumbling great whole. Bemoaning this in the thirties was Manfred Kridl, who wrote that Wyspiański's work is damaged by "simple, accessible and easy to remember shortcuts." They trivialize and undermine the writer's individuality, wrapping his work in ideology, erasing the artistic wholeness of his legacy and appropriating it to fit the general shallowness of the popular take on patriotic themes, for which he was branded a patron.[103]

101 Ratajczakowa, *Obrazy narodowe w dramacie i teatrze*, p. 327.
102 Włodzimierz Wójcik, *Legenda Piłsudskiego w polskiej literaturze międzywojennej*, (Katowice: Wydawnictwo "Śląsk," 1986), p. 40.
103 Ratajczakowa, *Obrazy narodowe w dramacie i teatrze*, p. 329.

Afterimages of the Revolutionary Body

Long after the enthusiasm that accompanied the outbreak of the war had died down, when all conviction that it was rational to continue the war had waned, the British commissioned Charlie Chaplin to direct the film SHOULDER ARMS,[104] in which the star appeared as a private who was to put an end to the interminable conflict by assassinating the German emperor. The plot, however, is treated as little more than a casual pretext. From the very beginning of the film, the viewer's attention is drawn to individual episodes which at once faithfully reproduce and grotesquely distort various situations typical of life in World War I trenches: inhuman conditions stripping the soldiers of their remaining humanity; the muck and the cold that paralyze the nervous system and destroy limbs; hunger and thirst; inescapable coexistence with lice and rats; the depersonalizing use of gas masks. These tragic and—as we learn from the many postwar works of literature and art that attempt to process the trauma—typical ordeals are reconstructed by Chaplin on his own body, employing specific theatrical means: dramatic and grotesque realism, as well as non-mimetic and non-naturalistic acting strategies.

In his analysis of the performative aspects of the grotesque, Ralf Remshardt points out the traits shared by the silent film grotesque and dramatic grotesque:

> First, a type of kinetic eccentricity that exposes the body as a mechanically dominated object (in the Bergsonian sense); second, a type of disjunctive narrative or diegetic flow that goes beyond purely linear mimesis and affords the temporal and logical ellipses typical of montage; and third, a type of character—the manipulated innocent—who

104 Charlie Chaplin, dir., SHOULDER ARMS, USA, 1918, 45 min. Starring Charlie Chaplin, Edna Purviance, Sydney Chaplin, Henry Bergman, and Albert Austin. The film score was composed by Chaplin in 1959 and reconstructed for live performance by Timothy Brock in 2002. In Poland the film's title was translated as *Charlie żołnierzem* and *Na ramię broń*.

> is nearly devoid of initiative or self-assertion in the classical character vein, a merely reactive character who persistently invites the wrath of a material world unleashed.[105]

If we accept Remshardt's observations, we begin to notice the repertoire of dramatic-theatrical means used by the director and lead actor of Shoulder Arms. Private Chaplin is an antihero, incapable of action in the war zone, whose every attempt at action is interrupted and ultimately abandoned, deferred by something of an organic defectiveness and the disintegration of his body as an actor and a soldier. Chaplin is a body, and he communicates physically in the manner of Mikhail Bakhtin's grotesque body[106]—a body always disjointed, amorphous, hybrid, ambivalent, which, always incomplete and never whole, is in a constant process of becoming, subject to transformation and metamorphosis, incapable of being distilled into a single meaning—into a picture of the soldier's disciplined corporality.

Analyzing the psychoanalytic impact of the comedic strategies employed by Jerzy Grotowski and Józef Szajna in *Acropolis*, Grzegorz Niziołek reveals the subliminal force exerted on the audience by the grotesque body—a body in a state of excess, bliss, and exaggeration. Examining the influence of Chaplin's acting in the creation of the "sorrowful grotesque of concentration camps," Niziołek points out the transformation of what is universal into what is material:

> There is no sacred thing that comedy doesn't undermine to the core—not so much compromising it but shifting it to the sphere of materiality. In comedy, the body is nothing more than the essence of humanity, and not a vessel for the soul. Because of this, the only topic, subject,

105 Ralf E. Remshardt, *Staging the Savage God: The Grotesque in Performance* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2004), p. 127.
106 See Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*.

> and object of comedy is the indestructibility of the body, which all the while suffers unfortunate incidents.[107]

In his analysis, Niziołek makes a connection between the realities of concentration camps and the world presented in the comedies of Charlie Chaplin. Finding a link between these two seemingly disparate realities in the presence of the body allows Niziołek to shed light on the functioning of physicality in a sphere of universal rules and restrictions. At the same time he demonstrates how the grotesque body in particular acutely brings out the mechanism of human objectification in conditions of radical violence in a world devoid of transcendence. The grotesque body, via freely circulating remains, also opens the door to the emergence of necroperformance. The performance of the body unfolding in Grotowski's *Acropolis*, as well as in Chaplin's film, is a theatre neither fully performed nor fully experienced.[108] This is a peculiar action of a corpse among other corpses—a necroperformance—in which a body-archive comes to life. This body is no more a tragic body;[109] its ultimate fate is not death but rather a constant resurrection. It is a body that never regains its integrity. It needs only mere remnants, material traces of memory, in order to be able to re-enact and reconstruct—to revive, if only in a fragmentary form, what is past and seemingly dead.

Even in Shoulder Arms, we can discern strategies and techniques that would soon become characteristic of Chaplin's

107 Grzegorz Niziołek, *Polski teatr Zagłady* (Warsaw: Instytut Teatralny im. Zbigniewa Raszewskiego and Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej, 2013), p. 302.
108 The categories of "performed theatre" vs. "experienced theatre" were coined by Michel Leiris in 1958 as a means of broadening the definition of theatre. See Leszek Kolankiewicz, "Teatr przeżywany według Michela Leirisa," in *Konteksty* 3 (2009), pp. 160–65.
109 Compare the deliberations regarding the tragic body and the comic body in Peter von Matt, "Tod und Gelächter. Der Aufstand der Literatur gegen den Ernst der letzten Dinge," in Peter von Matt, *Das Wilde und die Ordnung. Zur deutschen Literatur* (München: Carl Hanser Verlag GmbH & Co, 2007), p. 77.

acting. He achieves the grotesque body-effect through the performance of ill-fitting gestures at the correct time or appropriate gestures at the incorrect time, in this manner disrupting the gestural continuity of the (soldier's) body and its surroundings. This is well illustrated in the film's opening scene, in which Private Chaplin performs military drills. In the "alienated" repetition of routine soldier's gestures—standing in formation, saluting, marching, presenting arms, and so on—Chaplin's peculiar "dual-corporality" becomes evident: here, organicity counters the uniformity, lack of spontaneity, and physical objectification. In this way, the body of the soldier expands, branches out, and disarticulates, unveiling the cultural origins of the boundary between a person's inner self and his external body. As a private in the Great War, Chaplin's character meets the criterion of adequately underscoring the grotesqueness of experience, since: "Habits can only be made visible once they are cited and in turn once such imitation is interrupted, alienated and shocked: 'the more frequently we interrupt someone engaged in acting, the more gestures result.'"[110]

Only from this perspective, argues Paul Flaig (quoting Walter Benjamin), can we understand Chaplin's technique, the basis of which is "corporal fragmentation and the mechanical repetition of what is not to be repeated."[111] Through the unique use of the body as a medium for presenting history, particular scenes in Shoulder Arms reveal themselves to be grotesque commentaries on a persistent, repeating existential situation, and as performative reconstructions in a comic frame, based on an alienated re-enactment on one's own body of an Other's experience.

110 Paul Flaig, *Brecht, Chaplin and the Comic Inheritance of Marxism*, p. 8. www.academia.edu/962648/Brecht_Chaplin_and_the_Comic_Inheritance_of_Marxism, accessed March 8, 2015.
111 Ibid., p.8.

In his classic 1937 study *Attitudes Toward History*, Kenneth Burke defines a comic frame as something that can enable a person to become an observer of themselves while acting. Thus the ultimate aim is not to induce passive laughter from the viewer in response to a scene, but to make the viewer fully conscious of the actions of the Other that are alienated by the grotesque. A person "transcends" himself by noticing his own weaknesses, and can find rational justification for locating the irrational and non-rational as a result.[112] Since the comic frame defines human life as a composition, as an act of translation, it becomes a critical means for the deconstruction and reassembly of gestures, and for the reversal of order and the revision of social relations. Nevertheless, the comic frame cannot completely ease the alienation of contemporary society and should not be understood as a kind of reparation for this alienation. Instead, it ought to lead to the creation of a state of affairs in which the rules are less severe and the social regime is undermined.

With the use of non-mimetic theatricality and the placement of the tragic body in a comic frame, Chaplin succeeded in undermining the regime of the war and its environment of violence. Therefore it is no wonder that the British comic (largely as a result of his later films) became a model for his use of the body and laughter as mediums for emancipated political awareness in postwar European revolutionary theatre.[113] In his 1929 sketch

112 Kenneth Burke, *Attitudes Toward History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), p. 171.

113 Tomasz Majewski, in his book *Dialektyczne feerie. Szkoła frankfurcka i kultura popularna* (Warsaw: Officyna, 2011), writes on Chaplin's inclination toward leftist ideas and his sympathy for communist artists in German cinema and theatre. He recalls Chaplin's visit to Berlin from March 9–15, 1931: Chaplin appeared in front an enthusiastic public at the Vollmoellers Palais on Unter den Linden. The next appearance took place during a play at the Volksbühne, which occasioned an opportunity for the comic to manifest his leftist sympathies for the first time. The next demonstration that Chaplin was indeed a man of flesh and blood who went against the leanings of the majority of Germans came after Chaplin had tea with the head of the German police, during his tour of the workers' district of Altberlin, which was covered by the press. A turning point

"Rückblick auf Chaplin" (A Look at Chaplin), Walter Benjamin writes that "Chaplin has directed himself toward both the most international and most revolutionary affect of the masses—laughter,"[114] which was also the belief of his close friend, Bertolt Brecht, whose theatre aesthetics, philosophy, and politics were greatly influenced by Chaplin's anti-naturalistic acting. "Essentially, all of Brecht's epic theater theory, and thus his alienation effect, begins with contemplation of Chaplin's work," argued Konstanty Puzyna years later.[115] With this unequivocal statement Puzyna locates the foundations of Brecht's theatre theory and practice in the playwright's fascination with silent film, which relies (much like epic theatre later did) on the montage of self-contained, independent, and autonomous scenes/sequences. Above all Puzyna underscores Brecht's admiration for Chaplin's specific bodily technique, his gestural acting (*gestische Spielweise*), which "creates the alienation effect on the formal plane" and is strongly connected to Brecht's theatre philosophy: "to the

in the week-long stay in Berlin was a telephone interview with the *Junge Garde*, the youth organ of the Communist Party. The interview ended with a courteous statement in which Chaplin acknowledged and expressed his sympathy for the communist youth of Germany. [...] Many influential newspapers began to connect Chaplin's communist sympathies with his involvement in anti-German films from the period of World War I. The mood permeating the actor's visit changed in that Chaplin, fearing a backlash in the form of negative reviews for City Lights, made placatory remarks aimed at the Social Democratic press, who supported him. In an interview for Vortwärts he said: "I am an artist and I am not familiar with the political situation in this country. [...] My statements were not meant to be political in any sense. I don't intend to comment on things I don't know about. I deeply regret that what I had said was misunderstood." Nonetheless, soon afterwards, the comic met with a group of communist theatre and film artists, speaking with them about the problem of unemployment and about the promise of development attached to Communist Russia. *Rote Fahne*, the press organ of the German Communist Party related his greetings from that occasion: "Please convey my sincere and heart-felt salutations to the fighting workers and the unemployed." In response to this gesture, the communist named Chaplin a "friend of the working class," pp. 114–15.

114 Walter Benjamin, "A Look at Chaplin," trans. John MacKay, in "Walter Benjamin and Rudolf Arnheim on Chaplin," *Yale Journal of Criticism* 9, 2 (February 1996), p. 311.

115 Konstanty Puzyna, "Chaplin i Brecht," in *Dialog* no. 5 (1987), p. 144.

'distanced' viewpoint, with which, according to Brecht (the later Brecht of *A Short Organum for the Theater*), we have to approach the reality that surrounds us."[116]

Likewise, in Polish postwar revolutionary theatre Charlie Chaplin existed as an exemplary of modern political acting, eschewing mimetics and the gravity of bourgeoisie theatre in favor of the revolutionary dimension of the grotesque and laughter. A suitable example of this is the workers' theatre concept of Witold Wandurski, who was fascinated by the way Chaplin's acting undermined the dominant ideology through parody and imitation, and also by the fact that Chaplin's technique opened the door for the new worker-spectator to identify with the amateur actor, who, by way of the revolutionary effect of laughter, is able to demonstrate a hitherto unarticulated class consciousness. Wandurski expressed this in an emphatic manner:

> In transitional periods throughout history, when the influence of the ruling class begins to wane among the masses, and a new class, still unaware of its exact aims, acquires a certain strength in the social system—in these transitional periods the new viewer influences the theatre not by a change in the repertoire but by introducing their own actors into the plays imposed on them, actors who "bend" the theatre's tendencies toward the needs of the viewer, from his environment. The characteristic thing is that this ideological "bending" always follows the line of parody, indictment, caricature: laughter is the only effective revolutionary weapon, with which when used the new viewer, via the new actor, not only destroys the dominant ideology but also takes the theatre for himself. The actor representing the class yearnings of the viewer—and not of the author-dramaturgist—is the force determining the character of a given theatre. The dramaturgist, in fact, appears considerably later, when the theatre apparatus has been taken over by the new viewer. […] Actually, a good actor was also able to be—in the era of the rise of theatre—a good author. Serving as examples could be

116 Ibid.

> Aeschylus, Menander, Plautus, Molier, Lope de Rueda, Shakespeare, Charlie Chaplin … Somehow, they managed without dramaturgy schools, the kind in which today's bourgeoisie cultivates for their own purposes various "masked ball" hacks.[117]

Chaplin's film deserves attention not only for its grotesque performance of military ideology and as a new model of political acting but also for the particular reception it enjoyed in postwar Poland, even without official distribution. The film, as Wojciech Świdziński claims, "does not appear in the filmographies of Polish interwar cinemas, though perhaps it ought to be included."[118] An unofficial copy of Shoulder Arms was screened in Warsaw in 1925, as indicated by an advertisement in the May 14, 1925 edition of *Kurier Poranny*, which read: "*Pipman and Tenenbaum Behind the Camera.* Charlie Chaplin at war, with Lawiński and K. Tom. 2 hour screening. Światowid and Komedia Cinemas." Shoulder Arms was thus presented not in the typical form of a stand-alone screening but rather 'exhibited' (and in second-tier cinemas, no less) as a montage of clips from the original movie, supplemented with footage shot in Poland featuring two popular cabaret artists, who also happened to be the era's foremost actors specializing in *shmontses*: Ludwik Lawiński and Konrad Tom. "Perhaps both of them," suggests Świdziński, "even appeared in person during the screenings at the Światowid and Nowy cinemas as part of the two-hour program titled *Pipman and Tenenbaum Behind the Camera*, which Karol Ford called 'disgustingly tacky.'"[119]

This example of a re-theatricalization of Chaplin's film, so strongly reliant on theatrics in the first place, forces us to rethink the critical representation of trench life that gives rise

117 Witold Wandurski, "Scena robotnicza w Łodzi," in *Dźwignia* no. 4 (1927), p. 22.
118 Wojciech Świdziński, *Co było grane? Film zagraniczny w Polsce w latach 1918–1929 na przykładzie Warszawy* (Warsaw: Instytut Sztuki PAN, 2015), p. 280.
119 Ibid.

to the grotesque body. If we are to assume that the governing rule in this film is a repetition of theatricality, then we can see in the grotesque body not only a specific repetition of the theatre taking place on the frontlines during the Great War but also the forgotten source of postwar political theatre in Poland. It is true that the spontaneously arising frontline theatres often ceased to exist after the war or changed—as demonstrated by the case of Michał Lewicki's theatre company—into military or soldiers' theatre institutions whose mission became to preserve the legend of the Polish Legions and to support Sanacja (Sanation)—a political movement in interwar period which espoused Pilsudski's aspiration for a "moral healing" (*sanation*) of the Polish body politic. This idea, rooted in the medieval concept of likening a nation to a corporation,[120] also a tenet of modern biopolitics, was realized after Piłsudski's May 1926 coup and resulted in the anti-democratic, authoritarian state ideology of the Second Republic of Poland. The Sanacja period was a manifestation of the ressentiment of the history of the lordly estate and the feudal land after the experience of the First World War. The lines of social divide were renewed, a noble tradition reenacted. Józef Chałasiński, a student of Florian Znaniecki's and a co-translator of Bronisław Malinowski's *The Sexual Life of Savages in North-Western Melanesia*, analyzed the society of the Second Republic of Poland as being fractured, civilizationally stunted and entrenched in ressentiment of the nobility:

> Many features of the Polish intelligentsia are vestigial organs of feudal Poland; degenerate traces of noble tradition … The Polish intelligentsia was a kind of aristocratic embassy of Western European culture amidst the savage fields of a peasantly and backward Poland.[121]

120 See Ernst Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1957).
121 Józef Chałasiński, *Społeczna genealogia inteligencji polskiej* (Warsaw: Spółdzielnia Wydawnicza "Czytelnik", 1946), pp. 30, 49.

However, the revolutionary power of laughter and of the amateur frontline play returned in the interwar period as a constitutional trait in proletarian circles searching for identity and in the then burgeoning workers' theatres, which may be considered sites where the necroperformance of World War I proceeded via the medium of the grotesque body.

In the rebirth of Polish proletarian theatre, already in existence from the late 19th century, a huge role was played by the First World War: "Theatre," writes Witold Wandurski, the chief ideologue and practitioner of workers' theatre, "is in a state of crisis—as became evident particularly after the Great War."[122] One manifestation of this crisis was proletarian theatre's constant attachment to the pacifist perspective and to cabaret-like forms in referencing wartime experiences. Achieving great popularity was Stanisław Ryszard Stande's poem "Inwalidzi" (Invalids), first published in *Nowa Kultura* (1924, no. 12), which became a fixture in amateur workers' theatre repertoires, including Witold Wandurski's Łodź-based Workers' Stage. Wandurski staged the poem on November 21, 1926, brutally exposing the reasons behind the emergence of such a large number of unemployable cripples at the time:

> Stande's poem "Invalids" is adapted in a way that underscores the chasm between invalids outside of the bar and the patrons inside the bar dancing the shimmy and the Charleston (behind the glass)—through popular jazz hits playing non-stop behind the stage and singing "We Are the First Brigade." The silent figures in the foreground (an old lady, a drunken passerby, a prostitute, a pensioner) imbue the action with a dramatic dynamic. The poem is split up among four invalids: two on crutches, a blind man, and a legless man in a wheelchair.[123]

122 Witold Wandurski, "Kino, Teatr a Literatura," in *Robotnik* no. 351 (December 29, 1921), p. 4.
123 Wandurski, "Scena robotnicza w Łodzi," p. 29.

In such a presentation, the war, which the legionnaires so proudly fought in and which is repeated and preserved in the collective interwar memory, is depicted as the source of the nameless soldiers' disability and unemployment. This, however, was not a new statement in the theatre. It was rather a reiteration of the charges put forth in Wandurski's play *Śmierć na gruszy* (Death on a Pear-Tree), which premiered in 1925 in Krakow's Słowacki Theatre, directed by Stanisława Wysocka and the author, and was later performed in Łódź at the OKZZ Hall, directed by Maksymilian Szacki and the author.

Wandurski's drama is based on the one hand on a reconstruction of a folk legend, taking up the motif of death in captivity and offering a practical analysis of the possibility to reimagine traditional folk culture in the spirit of class struggle. On the other, it is a grotesque reenactment of the cruelty and senselessness of war. The imagery opening the play is an incisive echo of Lewicki's drama about legionnaire angels. The story takes place at the entryway to Heaven, where a jobless Saint Peter, accompanied by the Archangel Michael and a choir of angels, "puffs on a pipe"[124] while on earth—as Death reports—"everything is boiling over since that great war. Revolutions, crises, fascists … Hunger, cholera, and fever."[125] Already in the prologue Wandurski indicates that the essence of the play lies in the use of laughter as an instrument of revolution and in a structure borrowed from the cabaret—a series of loosely connected pictures, episodes, and sequences based on strong contrasts, paradoxes, and repetitions giving the impression of ideologically controlled chaos. Yet above all he makes it known that the play's main weapon is humor. In 1923 Wandurski's play was rejected by the Reduta Theatre for being overly political and, as assessed by Leon Schiller—perhaps reluctant to invite competition from Wandurski—for

124 Witold Wandurski, "Śmierć na gruszy," in Witold Wandurski, *Wiersze i dramaty* (Warsaw: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1958), p. 43.
125 Ibid., p. 45.

lacking a sense of humor. This absurd accusation evidently struck a nerve with Wandurski, as he recalled a few years later in a letter to Broniewski, in which he interpreted his own sense of humor: "My humor is at times crass—*Rabelais-esque* [emphasis added] (as was pointed out by a Czech critic upon seeing *Death on a Pear-Tree*), but it is always humor. And that is in the English understanding of the word—as a philosophical attitude. Those who know me well can see that."[126]

This particular kind of laughter, resulting from a reversal of the existing social order and from the portrayal of vulgarity and obscenity as the norm, contributed to the failure of the institutional premiere of *Death on a Pear-Tree* in Krakow, which culminated in popular and political scandal. After the first performance the police insisted that the fragments "defaming the Polish army" be removed from the play, and after the sixth the production was canceled, the author being accused of anti-state and anti-Polish intentions. The strongest objection was to the (re)staging of the war episode in which the actors appeared in Polish army uniforms and sang legion songs. One critic, who failed to grasp the author's political gesture, made no attempt to conceal his indignation: "From the camp of invalid cripples, with a legionnaire song on their lips and setting off to a new war escapade, what came over me was the thought of someone being harmed."[127] Likewise in Łódź the show was canceled after six performances. The Workers' Stage was soon closed down, which caused Witold Wandurski to return to smaller venues and semi-underground activity in May 1925. From then on he worked in rented halls, used scaled-down sets, and built his program around montages of numbers and songs in a manner characteristic of amateur troupes.[128]

126 Emphasis added. In Helena Karwacka, *Witold Wandurski* (Łodź: Wydawnictwo Łódzkie, 1968), p. 223.
127 Ibid., p. 228.
128 Karwacka offers the following example of such a mélange: the prologue to Majakowski's *Misterium Buffo*, Broniewski's *Róża*, Stande's *Invalids*, fragments

> The legacy he left behind would not satisfy any verification committee at any ministry. He ran the theatre in Łódź for five years, though by today's standards it would be called an amateur theatre. For a year he served as a theatre director, but that was somewhere in Soviet Kiev. He codirected a play at the Słowacki Theatre in Krakow; that show was a failure. He wrote about a dozen articles but who even remembers those? He wrote seven plays, but you'd be hard pressed to even recall the titles. Yet the heft of that legacy, when you carefully put it all together, strikes you with its unexpected similarity to such proposals as today would be called avant-garde theatre.[129]

In these bitterly ironic words, Witold Filler sums up the theatre of Witold Wandurski. He rightly notices the importance of Wandurski's political output, which enraged the bourgeoisie and intellectual public with its seemingly simple and plebeian style, and also notes that it was underrated by theatre historians, due, he claims, to judgments based on a shortage of material evidence—the result of "assumptions in place of facts, publicity in place of performance." The scant archival material, the fleeting traces of the amateur workers' theatres, also reveals another dimension in which postwar proletarian theatre repeated the fate of frontline theatres. Both of these phenomena, situated at the meeting point of art and politics, now barely figure in or, worse, are outright absent from Polish cultural memory, despite being quite popular in their day.

of Stefan Żeromski's 3 texts: *Róża*, *Gra o Herodzie*, and *Bartek Nędza a partie polityczne*—"a stage adaptation of a picture by Orkan produced in the style of an 'agitka' with an epilogue pieced together from snippets from *Słowo o Jakubie Szeli*." See Karwacka, *Witold Wandurski*, p. 175.

129 Witold Filler, "Teatr Witolda Wandurskiego," in Witold Wandurski, *Śmierć na gruszy* (Krakow: Teatr Satyry Maszkaron, 1986).

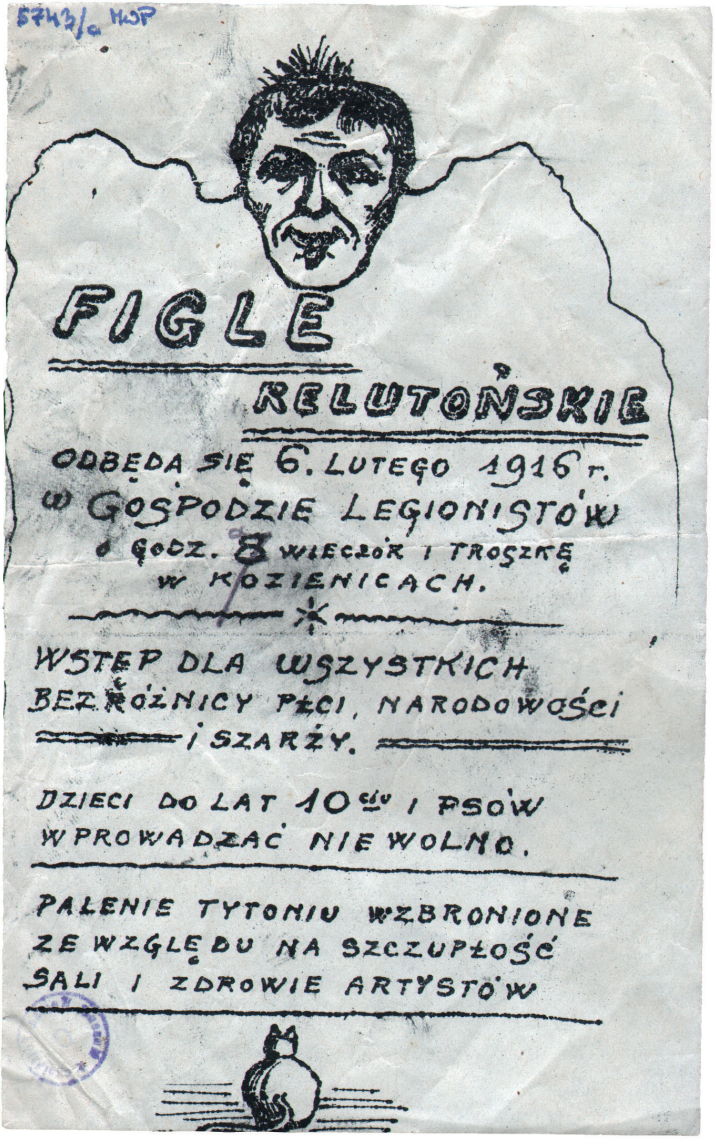

Fig. 25: Invitation to the legionnaires' cabaret evening, 1916, with following remarks: "access for all without distinction of gender, nationality or rank"; "children under 10 years of age and dogs must not be allowed to enter"; "smoking is prohibited because of the small size of the room and the health of the artists."

Phantom Bodies

The Invisible Front of the Great War

In his *Critique of Cynical Reason*, Peter Sloterdijk puts forth an intriguing thesis regarding the displacement of the old morality by a new front-line philosophy, designating this change as a crucial experience of German people after Germany's defeat in the First World War. Tracing the manifestations of militaristic nostalgia in the culture and politics of the Weimar Republic, he demonstrates how the magical word *front*, as it gradually moved on from the reality of the Great War into the fantasies of the public in post-World War I Germany, allowed people to believe in the possible rebirth of a type of "unambiguous character"[1] that was fading away in the era of political uncertainty and economic crisis. Particularly in the 1920s—as the violence of the war was either entirely repressed or deeply internalized—the "front" became the foundation of an integrated identity and a synonym for the sense of fraternity that was lost after the war. In the name of the "I fight therefore I am" mentality, and on the basis of the ensuing perceived opposition between war (linked with heroism, courage, and resilience) and politics (associated with instability, uncertainty, and softness), a new German characteristic of the era came to the fore: an internally integrated man-soldier responsible for the transformation of the "nonmasculine" citizen-civilian into a "registered, drafted, uniformed, engaged, disposable—subject in the original sense of the word as 'subjugated.'"[2] In just such a way, politics thus becomes necropolitics, which fundamentally necessitates the

1 Peter Sloterdijk, *Critique of Cynical Reason*, trans. Michael Eldred (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), p. 414.
2 Ibid., p. 434.

acknowledgement of the place afforded to life, death, and the human body in a given society—and above all the ways in which that society treats bodies that are injured or dead.[3]

Sloterdijk convincingly shows how death as a concept and as a metaphor was exploited in the Weimar Republic to alter the perception of sovereignty, politics, and the subject. Embracing such a perspective allows him to associate the new subjectivity taking shape after the experience of the First World War not with the thinking and feeling individual but rather with the abstract collective body: the armed nation that over time became a national "community-of-the-people-unto-death."[4] Sloterdijk does not hesitate to call this subject endowed with a frontline conscience by name: he is the "arch-Fascist," whose psychological driving force is a "pact with the dead." It was the ritual ceremonies of the survivors, glorifying the graves of those who died in the Great War, that perpetrated the myth of the Weimar Republic, a homage to those who overcame the trauma of the war's filth in the only way possible—by dying and thereby sparing the postwar generation from having to face the sight of maimed bodies, which would be an undignified representation of the new Germany. The antithesis of the real body of the war-wounded was the idealized military subject, the new machine-like warrior, who, with his *Stahlnatur* (steel-nature), was complete and indomitable, yet—as Sloterdijk noticed—was one who "becomes heroic because [he] is too cowardly to be weak."[5]

Visual culture played an enormous role in the formation of this abstract subjectivity, created in counterpoint to the physical degradation and breakdown of the real body with vitality, dynamism, and spiritual vigor. The new frontline mindset arose from an integration of earlier war imagery, returning like a spec-

3 Achille Mbembe, "Necropolitics," trans. Libby Meintjes, in *Public Culture* vol. 15, no. 1 (2003), p. 12.
4 Sloterdijk, *Critique of Cynical Reason,* p. 434.
5 Ibid., p. 457.

Fig. 26: John Heartfield, *Krieg und Leichen – Die letzte Hoffnung der Reichen*, 1932.

ter in the 1920s in paintings, photographs, literature, theatre, and, above all, in motion-based and motion-centric media like film, whose golden age happens to coincide with the era of the Weimar Republic. This period of prosperity in world cinema is no doubt at least partly attributable to the output of German cinema, which is often unjustifiably pigeonholed as "expressionist." As Thomas Elsaesser argues, the refined and export-worthy products of "expressionist cinema" had little in common with the broad spectrum of regional productions most eagerly watched by the German public of the day, which were detective films, comedies, melodramas, national epics, and period films, not to mention specifically German educational and documentary genres like *Aufklärungsfilme* and *Kulturfilme*.[6] It was popular cinema, heavily invested in spectacle, that became the stage for the representation of the experience of World War I—a window

6 See Thomas Elsaesser, *Weimar Cinema and After: Germany's Historical Imaginary* (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 18.

into mass suffering, violence, and death, and something of a "panopticon of the chaos of the postwar years."[7]

The common perception of silent film from the period of World War I and the Weimar Republic era as synonymous with "German expressionist cinema" was for many years upheld by two iconic publications devoted to the cinema of 1913 to 1933: Siegfried Kracauer's *From Caligari to Hitler* and Lotte Eisner's *The Haunted Screen*.[8] This seemingly homogenous genre in reality comprised a range of films, varying in terms of aesthetics and date and exemplifying different phases in the development of cinema, among them The Student of Prague (1913), The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari (1920), The Golem (1915), Nosferatu (1922), and Metropolis (1927). Expressionism was acknowledged by both authors as representative of Weimar cinema at large, a branch of cinema that entertains speculation and generalization on the "national character responsible for these aberrant fantasies and eccentric fictions."[9] The focus on elite auteur cinema and on the dark instincts, collective unconscious, and demonic undertones of the German soul that expressionist films tended to explore allowed Kracauer and Eisner—two Jewish emigrants who produced their respective tomes just after the Second World War—to arrive at a politically and ideologically unequivocal interpretation of the Weimar spirit. "The German soul," wrote Kracauer, was "haunted by the alternative images of tyrannic rule and instinct-governed chaos, threat-

7 Philipp Stiasny, *Das Kino und der Krieg. Deutschland 1914–1929* (Munich: edition text + kritik, 2009), p. 198.

8 Siegfried Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004); Lotte H. Eisner, *The Haunted Screen: Expressionism in the German Cinema and the Influence of Max Reinhardt* (Oakland: University of California Press, 1969). The Polish film scholar Tomasz Kłys published a book, based on new film-history literature, with this canonical approach to the history of Weimar Republic cinema. Tomasz Kłys, *Od Mabusego do Goebbelsa. Weimarskie filmy Fritza Langa i kino niemieckie do roku 1945* (Łódź: Wydawnictwo Biblioteki PWSFTviT, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, 2013).

9 Elsaesser, *Weimar Cinema and After*, p. 19

ened by doom on either side, tossed about in gloomy space like the phantom ship in *Nosferatu*."[10] Kracauer was deeply convinced of the influence exerted by the screen prototypes of this period on the madmen, tyrants, and charlatans who took power in Germany in 1933 and proceeded to implement real-life horrors. Viewed from the perspective of World War II, expressionist films forced the German people to consider their role and responsibility in a national socialist society, and their position on the prevailing passive tolerance towards the ideology of the "community-of-the-people-unto-death,"[11] as Sloterdijk put it, taking shape during the Weimar Republic era.

In Kracauer's early sociological analysis of German 1920s cinema, as well as in Sloterdijk's much later philosophical reflection on the subjectivity taking shape in the Weimar Republic, there is one striking constant: the Weimar Republic, with its continuation and intensification of the violence of the Great War leading into the dutiful preparation for the Second World War, took its people on a straight path (on all fronts—economic, political, and esthetic) to fascism. Such a point of view dovetails well with one of the basic models for interpreting German history: *Sonderweg* (special path), which emphasizes the direct line of development "from Bismarck to Hitler" and reveals "the responsibility of the authoritarian power structures of the German emperor for the failure of democracy taking root in Germany, and, consequently, for the growth and success of national socialism."[12] Though some theories date Germany's distinct developmental path to before the First World War,[13] the negative

10 Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler*, p. 107.

11 Sloterdijk, *Critique of Cynical Reason*, p. 434.

12 Torsten Lorenz, "Niemiecka droga odrębna. Geneza, rozwój i uhistorycznienie pewnej Master Narrative," in *Drogi odrębne, drogi wspólne. Problem specyfiki rozwoju historycznego Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej w XIX–XX wieku*, ed. Maciej Janowski (Warsaw: Instytut Historii Polskiej Akademii Nauk, 2014), p. 33.

13 The history of the Sonderweg concept is outlined in the anthology *Sonderweg. Spory o "niemiecką drogę odrębną,"* ed. Hubert Orłowski, trans. Jerzy Kałążny (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, 2008).

face of the idea came into focus only during the next war in German political-émigré circles, after which it dominated the perception of German Federal Republic history until the 1980s.

This teleological perspective has undergone extensive modification, complication, and even criticism since then. In the traditional Marxist view the main reason for Hitler's success after Germany's defeat in the war is identified as the coalition of monopolistic capitalism and Prussian militarism against social democracy. Meanwhile, the neo-Marxist interpretation theorizes that the idealization of the French, English, and American paths to modernity obscured the tensions in all Western societies, and even the incongruities between the growth of capitalism and democracy. From this perspective the triumph of radical fascism in Germany can be seen as an effect of the mobilization of right-wing currents against socialism, which revealed themselves in as early as the 1890s among the middle class.[14] There have also been numerous impulses suggesting the need to expand the perspective to include the realm of global interests in order to identify the links connecting military force with expansion and economic dominance; links that are of crucial importance in the timeframe bookended by the two world wars.[15] Finally, there have been attempts to see the German *Sonderweg* not only as a means of explaining the phenomenon of Hitlerism but also as a "unique case in a broader current of dependency theories dealing with the issue of backwardness and with the relationship between center and peripheries."[16] Assuming this perspective, the German *Sonderweg* identifies a distinctness in the modernization processes occurring in East Central Europe, at the same time making it possible to include in the reflection on this special path the matter of the feudal

14 See Lorenz, "Niemiecka droga odrębna," p. 36

15 Ernest Mandel, *The Meaning of the Second World War* (London: Verso, 1986).

16 Maciej Janowski, "Drogi odrębne, drogi wspólne …," in *Drogi odrębne, drogi wspólne*, p. 21.

system's persistence as a sign of the warped nature of not only German but also Polish modernity.

All of these perspectives allow us to see the Weimar Republic as a period of a failed struggle for democracy, and also as a timeframe darkened, in terms of social and economic conditions and in ways that are ambiguous and complicated, by the shadow of World War I.[17] Eric D. Weitz begins his monograph on Weimar Germany with a photograph of German soldiers in November 1918, captioned with the bitter words: "A defeated army on its return home is never a pretty sight"[18] And indeed, the picture of the conquered German army is in no way reminiscent of the well-organized collective body that euphorically set off for the front lines in 1914. These are rather shadows of human beings, exhausted bodies, moving along in clumsy formation like a pack of zombies. While the Great War took the lives of two million German men, we must remember that more than twice that number returned home wounded and maimed, having to face reality in a horrifically altered state. This confrontation proved painful, a situation which greatly worried the main character of *All Quiet on the Western Front*, Paul Bäumer, who "fortunately" did not live to experience it himself:

> Now if we go back we will be weary, broken, burnt out, rootless, and without hope. We will not be able to find our way anymore. [...] We will be superfluous even to ourselves, we will grow older, a few will adapt themselves, others will merely submit, and most will be bewildered;—the years will pass by and in the end we shall fall into ruin.[19]

The experience of finding oneself utterly ill-suited to civilian life manifested in the socioeconomic situation of veterans,

17 See Eric D. Weitz, *Weimar Germany: Promise and Tragedy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013), p. 1.
18 Ibid., p. 7.
19 Erich Maria Remarque, *All Quiet on the Western Front*, trans. Arthur Wesley Wheen (New York: Ballantine Books, 1982), p. 294.

which later worsened exponentially with the demobilization in January 1919, when, of the nearly eight million German soldiers returning home, only one million soldiers were retained in service.[20] Only those who were most qualified filled the ranks of paramilitary organizations such as the Freikorps, which were the only remaining semblance of an "armed nation." Moreover, the majority of the returning soldiers belonged to the so-called "front generation," men born in the last two decades of the 19th century, whose youth coincided with the turn of the century and who were conscripted to fight on the front lines in greatest numbers and for the longest period of time. So upon returning home these men were still relatively young, though their personal identity was marked by a certain fundamental void. As Detlev Peukert points out, they acquired political experience while all too frequently their personal experience connected with their choice of profession and the pursuit of starting a family—was delayed by the war and could only proceed thereafter.[21]

The masses of demobilized warriors quickly turned into masses of unemployed veterans who, like the youngest generation of German men, "felt 'superfluous', because they were confronted by a stagnant economy and a saturated labour market."[22] Many workplaces, especially those in manufacturing, had been taken over by women during the war, and those of the returning soldiers who came back disabled were often unfit to perform any kind of physical labor. Many also suffered from shell shock, which rendered them incapable of anything but loitering aimlessly around town or perhaps gathering with other veterans to reminisce about their time in the army. Others still—like the main character of Ernst Toller's (1923)

20 Weitz, *Weimar Germany*, p. 8.
21 Detlev J.K. Peukert, *The Weimar Republic: The Crisis of Classical Modernity* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1993), p. 17.
22 Ibid., p. 18.

drama, the eunuch Hinkemann—deprived by the war of their biological and social masculinity, were only able to find work that stripped them of any remains of human dignity they still possessed. Those soldiers physically disabled by the war, like Hinkemann, and the many "one-armed and one-legged war invalids,"[23] ended up in market stalls where, in flesh-colored leotards, they were made to play-act the "real German hero" who devours live rats and mice for an audience's amusement. The humiliation the character is subjected to, forced to support his family in a manner that breeds a sense of ethical repulsion, and above all rouses his lameness, his "hidden disease,"[24] quickly drives him to insanity. It all ends in personal tragedy: the failed fertility rituals that Hinkemann performs with a statue of Priapus leads to his estrangement from his wife Grete and ultimately to her suicide.

The drastic wartime experiences, the resulting illness and disability, and finally the effects of the postwar social and economic crisis—unemployment and poverty—were by no means limited to German soldiers. The supranational dimension of civilian death in countries that participated in the global war were addressed by Władysław Broniewski in the pacifist poem *Ostatnia wojna* (The Last War), from the 1925 anthology *Wiatraki* (Windmills). The poem builds a poignant picture of a march of soldiers risen from the grave—"rotting, decomposing, faceless" men who "flood" the streets and squares of cities destroyed in the war

> Walked
> The Germans
> In their steel helmets
> From Verdun
> From the Somme

23 Toller, *Hinkemann*.
24 Ibid.

From the Marne
They walked
Frozen in Belgian ditches
The black colonial soldiers.
They walked
The blue French Zouaves
The Russians drowned in Mazurian lakes
The Austrians from the eleven Piave offensives.
They walked
The stabbed
The choked
The shattered.[25]

Of the soldiers returning from the 1915–18 war throughout Europe, every third man was wounded or injured to some degree. If we add to that the equally large numbers of widows and orphans left behind by the fallen,[26] we can conclude that the complex problems associated with the return to civilian life were a universal phenomenon that dictated, to a fundamental extent, the realities of social life in all of Europe.

It would be difficult to imagine a history of that period without those who returned from the frontlines of World War I. Phenomena like the emergence of totalitarianism, pacifism, democracy being introduced, social benefits, the evolution of medical and psychiatric diagnostics, and even interwar criminality and the popularity of tobacco are inextricably linked with World War I veterans.[27]

There is no question that the countries of Europe adopted different strategies on how to heal the wounds inflicted by

25 Władysław Broniewski, "Ostatnia wojna," in *Wybór wierszy*, ed. and intro. Tadeusz Bujnicki (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 2014), pp. 47–48.
26 Marcin Jarząbek, "Zwycięzcy nie swojej wojny—weterani I wojny światowej w II Rzeczypospolitej na tle europejskim," in *Drogi odrębne, drogi wspólne*, p. 310
27 Ibid., p. 301.

the war, depending on the status of a given country as either an old, established state or one that was newly instated at the war's conclusion. In Poland the veteran situation was specific to the "dualism in combatant circles"[28] unlike anywhere else, which divided soldiers, laconically framed by one physician, Dr Bolesław Kikiewicz, as "Polish Army invalids" who deserved "gratitude," versus "foreign army invalids" for whom there was only "sympathy."[29] Thus there were multitudes of former soldiers of partitioning country armies ("soldiers—Poles"), and on the other side, a considerably smaller contingent of legionnaires ("Polish soldiers"), who were granted privileged status in the official discourse with respect to their symbolic, economic, and political significance.[30] Nevertheless, the extreme attitudes of veterans impacted by their wartime experiences—from passivity and reclusiveness, to a sense of solidarity with other veterans and a drive for political engagement, and even to fascist radicalism—were phenomena that defined the character of not only the Weimar Republic but most of Europe as well.

This is well illustrated by Władysław Grodnicki's play *Legionista. Obrazek tragiczny w jednym akcie* (Legionnaire: A Tragic Picture in One Act),[31] whose protagonist is Tadeusz Dziwisz, a former soldier of the 1st Brigade of the Polish Legions, now an anti-Semitic, unemployed alcoholic battling depression. The reality is that Dziwisz's honor as a legionnaire, built on "fighting for the homeland's independence from the age of fourteen," qualifies him for no other work than carrying a rifle and in the absence of war relegates him to "groveling, being

28 Ibid., p. 307.

29 See Bolesław Kikiewcz, "Inwalidzi 'polscy' a inwalidzi Polacy," in *Inwalida* no. 8 (1919), p. 1, cited in Marcin Jarząbek, "Zwycięzcy nie swojej wojny."

30 This concerns soldiers of the Polish Legions and its offshoot formations, the three Polish Corps in the east founded after the February Revolution: the Blue Army established in France, the Puławy Legion, and small units in Italy and Finland. Ibid.

31 Władysław Grodnicki, "Legionista. Obrazek tragiczny w jednym akcie," in *Utwory jednoaktowe* (Warsaw: Tygodnik Wiarus, 1937).

crushed and humiliated," which is how Kruk, his comrade from the frontlines, describes work in an office or in a factory. The legionnaire's sense of superiority and entitlement to a higher social class also breeds in Dziwisz a disdain for those who do not share his "generational experience." This is manifest in his contempt for his own wife, who seeks employment in a factory; in his disgust towards the tenement-building owner, Kobryński the Jew; and his scorn for the factory deputy director, the engineer Sobański, who spent the years 1914–18 at university and not in the war. The wait for the next war, which defines the legionnaire's existence, ends tragically in his unheroic death—an accidental self-inflicted gunshot wound from his own gun when, in an act of jealousy, he hurls to the floor his old World War I pistol that has hung above the sofa next to the Polish eagle from the beginning of the play.

Another example of a work addressing the subject of the "disposable" life of the veteran in the face of the mounting threat of fascism comes courtesy of Ewa Szelburg-Zarembina's 1932 drama *Ecce homo*.[32] This expressionist play also questions the proliferation of commemorative rituals in the face of the unresolved social and economic problems arising from the war and ensuing crises. This becomes especially evident in the second scene, "At the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier," in which a Chorus of Mothers mourning their sons is joined by a Chorus of Invalids—"maimed individuals with peg legs, on crutches and in braces,"[33] across from whom stands a Crowd of young and healthy people. The able-bodied civilians—in the play offering an ironic reference to the Dziady ritual in Mickiewicz's *Forefathers' Eve*, a pre-Christian Slavic ceremony during which living people celebrate their connection with dead ancestors—proceed to chase away the unemployable and unlovable "cripples."

32 Ewa Szelburg-Zarembina, "Ecce homo. Opowieść sceniczna," in *Dzieła*, vol. 4 (Lublin: Wydawnictwo Lubelskie, 1972).
33 Ibid., p. 22.

The Master of Ceremony, appearing as a *deus ex machina*, offers the invalids membership in the cult of heroes as a replacement for employment, a ritual in place of life. In so doing he reveals another dimension of the postwar battleground: born from amidst the decaying bones is not new life but merely another "forest of crosses." When, in the next scene, "In the Factory," a mass of unemployed people who are "torn apart from inside by hunger," whose "marrow goes dry in their bones," and whose "flaccid flesh hangs from their bones"[34] form a revolutionary march, the only solution to the crisis offered by the Employer is—just like in Georg Kaiser's *Gas*—to produce poison gasses and explosives in preparation for the next war.

Looking at the suffering and fate of ordinary soldiers and their families after the Great War reveals, more from the cultural perspective than the political one, the problematics of the concept of the German "special path." In his book on the meaning of world war to European cultural history, Jay Winter writes:

> Recalling this aspect of the war also helps to cast further doubt on the outmoded idea that Germany went through a special path, a *Sonderweg* in the nineteenth and twentieth century. [...] [A]ll major combatants went through a "special" path, the path of collective slaughter.[35]

Only by accepting the "frontline generation" as a lost generation and—contrary to Sloterdijk's suggestion—one that did not conceal its weaknesses or suffering, does it become productive to consider the status and function of cinema in the era of the Weimar Republic and the ideological ambiguity of the notion of the "front." Looking at postwar challenges and trauma—the returning masses of exhausted soldiers' bodies—through the prism of film seems to be of major importance

34 Ibid., p. 28.
35 Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 227.

here. As a medium film can uniquely examine the process of the lifeless returning to life. This is especially so on account of film being the most democratic and universal of mediums, one that engenders expression of and reflection on the supranational experience of soldiers.

The Psychosexuality of the Soldier

The heyday of German cinema, and in fact of the entire German film industry, coincides with the period of the Great War and with governmental decisions taking place at that time. In 1916 the German government established Deulig (Deutsche-Lichtspiel-Gesellschaft), the film association whose mission was to produce documentary propaganda films. Shortly afterwards, in 1917, the Prussian Ministry of War created the BUFA (Bild und Filmamt) to oversee frontline cinema and to produce films documenting the war effort. Finally—as the United States joined in the war and as American films proved peerless in their ability to spread hatred for Germans globally—General Ludendorff hit upon an idea of merging the existing film associations and to invite a group of financiers, industrialists, and bankers to help counteract the American film offensive. This effort formed the UFA (Universum Film Aktiengesellschaft), established on December 18, 1917 as Europe's only true answer to Hollywood.[36] The movies produced by this company reached all of the cinemas in Europe, to a large extent dominating the repertoires of Warsaw's postwar screening rooms, especially in the years 1918 to 1921.[37] Initially producing propaganda material, UFA soon expanded into melodramas, adventure and detec-

36 The history of the UFA is outlined in detail in Kłys, *Od Mabusego do Goebbelsa*, pp. 18–23.

37 Wojciech Świdziński writes about this in detail in *Co było grane? Film zagraniczny w Polsce w latach 1918–1929 na przykładzie Warszawy* (Warsaw: Instytut Sztuki PAN, 2015).

tive series, fables, and bold comedies, often screened in Poland with the disclaimer "for adult audiences only."[38]

Also beginning during the war was the production of films that were no less "specifically German" than the expressionist kind, known as *Kulturfilme* and *Aufklärungsfilme* (culture films and educational films)—movies for the study of the body and sexuality and for general enlightenment.[39] The foremost creator of such educational films, which Tomasz Kłys urges ought to be referred to as "awareness films,"[40] was the Austrian film and stage director Richard Oswald, who by 1915 had completed Das eiserne Kreuz (The Iron Cross), which was immediately seized by authorities due to its pacifistic tone. The following year Oswald set up his own production company, Richard Oswald-Film GmbH, under which he produced approximately 100 titles. Between 1917 and 1918—commissioned by the Ministry of War in collaboration with the head of the German Society for Combatting Venereal Disease (Deutsche Gesellschaft zur Bekämpfung der Geschlechtskrankheiten), the dermatologist Dr. Alfred Blaschko, and later with the sexologist Iwan Bloch—he produced the first three parts of a five-part series titled Es werde Licht! (Let There Be Light!), focusing on the subject of sexually transmitted diseases and sexual awareness. These films starred some future stars of expressionist cinema, including two costars of The Cabinet of Dr Caligari, Werner Krauß and Conrad Veidt, the latter of whom became a staple of Oswald's productions.

Born in 1893, Veidt was himself a member of the front generation: after the outbreak of the war he was conscripted and deployed to the eastern front but was quickly discharged due to poor health. He returned to the Deutsches Theater in 1917, where he had studied acting under Max Reinhardt before the

38 See ibid., pp. 60–61.
39 See Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler*, p. 44.
40 Kłys, *Od Mabusego do Goebbelsa*, p. 54.

war. Yet it was his work with Oswald that paved his way to German popular cinema. After he became a star, Veidt joined Oswald on a number of period pieces that were well known even to Polish audiences, such as Lucrezia Borgia (1922), Lady Hamilton (1921), and Don Carlos and Elizabeth (1924). In 1926 they also collaborated on the film Dürfen wir schweigen? (Ought We Be Silent?)—a remake of the first part of Es werde Licht!, which tells the story of the psychological and physical downfall of the syphilitic Paul Hartwig. Ought We Be Silent? was ostensibly the only educational film to find any sort of success among Polish viewers, having premiered in Warsaw on October 14, 1926, at the Apollo cinema.[41]

To link the issue of venereal disease with the experience of Great War soldiers seems a rather obvious progression. The rate of infection at the time grew incessantly, and physicians feared that the soldiers returning home from the war would infect their wives and children with syphilis. For this reason an educational campaign overseen by doctors was initiated towards the end of the war (and intensified after 1918) to inform the public on how the disease spreads and—in a moralizing gesture—to promote decent conduct. As Anita Gertiser states, films played a primary role in the process of educating the public, serving as a platform for a "media enactment of infection," especially in the 1920s, when a large proportion of German cinema was devoted to self-care education.[42]

41 Świdziński says this about the absence of *Aufklärungsfilme* in Warsaw cinemas: "In Warsaw's cinemas the famed 'educational films' clearly did not find a home [...]. In free Poland these films were considered 'German filth,' and it was lamented that the Polish populations of Upper Silesia were subjected to exposure to them." Świdziński, *Co było grane? Film zagraniczny w Polsce w latach 1918–1929 na przykładzie Warszawy*, p. 63.

42 Anita Gertiser, *Der Schrecken wohnt im Schönen. Darstellung devianter Sexualität in den Aufklärungsfilmen zur Bekämpfung der Geschlechtskrankheiten der 1920er-Jahre*, www.zeitenblicke.de/2008/3/gertiser/index_html, accessed September 10, 2015.

During the war, Richard Oswald also began working with Magnus Hirschfeld, the future founder of the pioneering Institute for Sexual Science in Berlin (1919) and of the World League for Sexual Reform.[43] Together they produced educational films addressing the taboo surrounding sexuality and the penalization of various sexual activities. Their collaboration spawned the final part of Oswald's series, which was screened in November 1918 under the stand-alone title Sündige Mutter (Sinful Mother). It dealt with a piece of legislation known as Paragraph 218, which imposed severe penalties on women having abortions and on the doctors who performed them. The abortion ban, unchanged in Germany since 1871, took on particular significance at the beginning of the war, when, as Tadeusz Boy-Żeleński correctly points out, Germany saw the rise of "leagues agitating for maximal population growth, so as to fill in the holes torn out by artillery shells."[44] Women's opposition to this pro-militaristic population policy inspired the famous childbearing strike (*Gebärstreik*) of 1917. Oswald and Hirschfeld's film was a direct response to the militarization of the female body that was promoted under the guise of patriotism and civic duty.

The film genre single-handedly developed by Oswald was actually learned from the war—it was, after all, a kind of flippant play on the wartime propaganda films that so universally and effectively influenced the masses. The educational film, using

43 The World League for Sexual Reform, founded by Magnus Hirschfeld, was established in Copenhagen in 1928 during a sexology conference. It was a political organization dealing with issues considered critical in changing the public perception of sexuality, such as "marital reform, birth control, 'women's issues,' eugenics, tolerance for single mothers and sexual diversity, sex education, prevention of prostitution and venereal diseases, sexual 'aberrations,' and legislation on issues connected with sexuality." See Magdalena Gawin, Ivan Crozier, "Światowa Liga Reformy Seksualnej w latach międzywojennych w Anglii i w Polsce," in *Kobieta i rewolucja obyczajowa. Społeczno-kulturowe aspekty seksualności. Wiek XIX i XX*, vol. IX, eds. Anna Żarnowska and Andrzej Szwarc (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo DiG, 2006), pp. 311–33.

44 Tadeusz Boy-Żeleński, *Piekło kobiet* (Warsaw: Dom Wydawniczy Szczepan Szymański, 1991), p. 57.

documentary footage to offer medical information paired with a melodramatic plot, gave birth to a new form of film writing that combined affective aesthetics with scientific objectivity. The potential danger of this genre to the masses, to the "German nation," was quickly pointed out by conservative critics, who identified in these "disgraceful sex films" the direct influence of the revolution in Russia.[45] When the Prussian censorship law was repealed in November 1918, Oswald produced film after film and harnessed the commercial potential of movies dealing with sexuality by endowing the products of his original *Aufklärungsfilm* genre with melodramatic titles like Vom Rande des Sumpfs (On the Edge of the Bog; 1919), Frauen, die der Abgrund verschlingt (Women Engulfed by the Abyss; 1918), Verlorene Töchter (Lost Daughters; 1918), and Hyänen der Lust (Hyenas of Lust; 1919). They drew throngs of postwar viewers from all social classes and both sexes. Without a doubt, it was this popular and non-elitist cinema—one that focused on the ailing and suffering body, a stifled and recuperating body, and not on the demonic German soul—that addressed the real societal problems after the war. Siegfried Kracauer maintained a decidedly negative opinion of such "sex films," criticizing them for being without revolutionary meaning. Claiming that "these films had nothing in common with the prewar revolt against outmoded sexual conventions,"[46] he welcomed the May 1920 reinstatement of censorship with enthusiasm.

> The sex films testified to primitive needs arising in all belligerent countries after the war. Nature itself urged that people who had, for an eternity, faced death and destruction, reconfirm their violated life instincts by means of excesses. It was an all but automatic process.[47]

45 Joachim S. Hohmann, *Sexualforschung und -aufklärung in der Weimarer Republik. Eine Übersicht in Materialien und Dokumenten mit einem Beitrag über den frühen Aufklärungsfilm* (Berlin/Frankfurt am Main: Foerster Verlag, 1985), p. 64.
46 Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler*, p. 45–46.
47 Ibid., p. 45.

Kracauer noticed a particular interest in such films among the masses of demobilized soldiers, yet he qualified it only with a remark on their failure to acclimate to civilian life.[48] Even with the success of *Aufklärungsfilme* he failed to identify the need for working through the psychophysical effects of the sexual behaviors of soldiers and women during the war, or the educational and psychotherapeutic possibilities of these "sex films"—despite their proliferation: there were more than 150 produced in the single censorship-free year. And it was in this "lowly" film genre that the body became the site for the articulation of the social drama alienating the contemporary viewer, an achievement especially evident in the films of Richard Oswald. The director answered the viewers' desirous glance not so much with the "'fascisation' of the body as with a somewhat neurotic yearning for experiencing the 'truth' of sexuality and illness."[49]

It is accurately pointed out by Malte Hagener and Jan Hans[50] that the rise of the subject of sexuality just after the First World War was by no means a novelty in the field of culture. On the contrary, the phenomenon was merely a continuation of the societal emancipation and liberalization of the body's presence in culture which had been underway since the end of the 19th century. That being said, the issue did acquire a new dimension after the war. The arrival of film popularized the subject of the body and sexuality, bringing it to the masses. Klaus Kreimerer noticed in this genre signs of the democratization of social life, and in its commercial nature a potential to combat the taboos surrounding the body, specifically genitals, across social

48 See Ibid.

49 Georg Seeßlen, "Triviale Sehnsüchte und die wilden Bilder des Richard Oswald," in *Richard Oswald: Regisseur und Produzent*, ed. Helga Belach and Wolfgang Jacobsen (Munich: edition text+kritik, 1990), p. 47.

50 Malte Hagener and Jan Hans, *Von Wilhelm zu Weimar. Der Aufklärungs- und Sittenfilm zwischen Zensur und Markt, w: Geschlecht in Fesseln. Sexualität zwischen. Aufklärung und Ausbeutung im Weimarer Kino 1918–1933*, ed. Malte Hagener (Munich: edition text+kritik, 2000), pp. 7–22.

classes. In doing so he identified a strong connection between the emergence of sexuality films and the experience of Great War soldiers:

> In the combat units of World War I, the experience of the front—connected with extended sexual abstinence on the one hand and a draconian approach to remedying the sexual drive through brothel visits by private soldiers and officers on the other—caused a hitherto unimaginable degree of erotic dehumanization. [...] The war reduced the male body, which at any moment could be torn to bits, even in the realm of love, to nothing more than biological matter, subject to discipline and violence. [...] It is a fact that, in this discipline being extended to the sexual act, what became lost in the shuffle was bliss, which is one of the most tragic consequences of the war of nations for erotic culture in the postwar years.[51]

Depicting a range of non-normative aspects—from a male body suffering the destructive effects of syphilis, to a female body exhausted by social conditions and unable to have an abortion, to a broad spectrum of non-normative bodies—*Aufklärungsfilme* seem to effectively challenge Sloterdijk's thesis that the new subject of the postwar era was solely a tough, unbreakable, and internally integrated male soldier.

Here an excellent example is the figure of Magnus Hirschfeld in Richard Oswald's Anders als die Anderen (Different from the Others), the first ever film to address the issue of homosexuality as a punishable offense,[52] one which became something

51 Klaus Kreimerer, "Aufklärung, Kommerzialismus und Demokratie oder Der Bankrott des deutschen Mannes," in *Richard Oswald: Regisseur und Produzent*, eds. Helga Belach and Wolfgang Jacobsen, pp. 12–14.

52 This film, much like others of this genre, was banned in 1920 and its original copies were destroyed. Only an abridged version survived, used by Magnus Hirschfeld in 1927 in the documentary Gesetze der Liebe. A Ukrainian version survived and was finally returned to Germany in the 1970s. In the 1990s the Filmmuseum in Munich began reconstruction work on the film, the result of which

of a campaign against Paragraph 175, a German law criminalizing homosexual acts between males. In the film, Hirschfeld appears as both a social figure, functioning in the erstwhile political context as the chief ideologue fighting for homo-, bi-, and transsexual rights, and as a film character—he plays a sexologist, a scientific authority. The lecture on homosexuality he delivers in the film is no different than the seminars he led prior to the war as a public figure in the Wilhelmian Reich. The only difference is the medium—from the direct contact of a lecture in a small auditorium, the scientist is brought to the film screen along with all of the staging elements and documentation (including photographs illustrating intersexuality and transvestitism). From this perspective the period of the war was not an outright severance from prewar culture but rather a radical media transition. Hirschfeld pointed out the need for those "who today stand in the service of education" to take advantage of the new medium.[53]

Moreover, Hirschfeld represents the traits of a typical soldier/intellectual who welcomed the outbreak of war with enthusiasm and was just as swiftly overcome with irreversible disillusionment. Hirschfeld put aside his research for the duration of the war to dedicate himself to treating the wounded in field hospitals as a Red Cross physician. In 1916 he wrote the text *Kriegspsychologisches* (War Psychologies), in which he compiled his various impressions from his contact with wounded and dying soldiers.[54] Coming to the fore in that article is a skepticism towards the war—both regarding war itself and the earlier confidence, shared by many, in certain victory for the heavily

was a 2006 DVD release. See Stefan Volk, *Skandalfilme. Cineastische Aufreger gestern und heute* (Marburg: Schüren Verlag, 2011).

53 Cited in Hohmann, *Sexualforschung und -aufklärung in der Weimarer Republik*, p. 258.

54 Magnus Hirschfeld, *Kriegspsychologisches* (Bonn: De Gruyter, 1916).

militarized Germany.[55] Though it is still with a certain fascination that he writes about the "one-of-a-kind destruction of life" that the war brings, he does clearly denounce the cynicism of the "war glorifiers," who see in it a "cleansing of the soul by fire," underscoring that "a significant majority of Germans, as well as members of other nationalities, do not need this war, neither as an implement of discipline nor as a reform institution."[56] Hirschfeld describes his vision of a procession of the dead, wounded, captive, ostracized, orphaned, and impoverished, who were members of all races and nationalities, expressing the universality, as opposed to the Germanness, of the war experience as both a soldier and civilian.

Hirschfeld's war experience was the basis for his *Sittengeschichte des Ersten Weltkrieges* (Moral History of the First World War),[57] cowritten with Andreas Gaspar and published in 1929. The pair used documentary material for their analysis of the relationship between soldiers' sex lives and the war: photographs, sketches, drawings, paintings, postcards, letters, soldiers' journals, military announcements, medical regulations, and press notes, as well as psychoanalytic and sexological articles. Their analysis of these thoughtfully selected resources generated a thorough study identifying the social and psychological consequences of the psychosexual drives of people touched by the war. They studied manifestations of sexuality such as prostitution, pornography, sexually transmitted diseases, masturbation, homosexuality, and sexual deviance, as well as the rela-

55 This is written about in detail by Sophinnette Becker, who also analyzes Hirschfeld's earlier and later writing on the war. Sophinnette Becker, "Tragik eines deutschen Juden. Anmerkungen drei politischen Schriften von Magnus Hirschfeld," in *Durch Wissenschaft zur Gerechtigkeit? Textsammlung zur kritischen Rezeption des Schaffens von Magnus Hirschfeld*, ed. Andreas Seeck (Munich: LIT Verlag, 2003), pp. 207–22.

56 Hirschfeld, "Kriegspsychologisches," pp. 4, 3, 14.

57 For this publication, I use the second, corrected edition. Magnus von Hirschfeld and Andreas Gaspar, eds., *Sittengeschichte des Ersten Weltkrieges*, ed. Magnus Hirschfeld and Andreas Gaspar (Hanau: Komet, 1995).

tionship of sexual behaviors to the repressive "front morality" enforced by the military and the state during the war. Emerging from Hirschfeld's work is a picture not so much of sexuality as a major element of the war itself, but rather of its consequences on the psychological and physical state of former Great War soldiers and of those soldiers' attempts to reintegrate themselves into society and family.

Taking note of the extraordinary popularity of educational films after the war invites the conclusion that the Weimar spirit was more corporal than Kracauer thought and considerably less abstract than Sloterdijk posited. The fulcrum of the many popular commercial films of this kind was not the demonic German soul but rather the human body studied in its biological and cultural aspects. Such an anthropological, and not just ideological, perspective is adopted by Wilhelm Prager and Nicholas Kaufmann's most famous *Kulturfilm*, Wege zu Kraft und Schönheit (Ways to Strength and Beauty) from 1925, which takes a multifaceted approach to the body, showing it from infancy to old age, from Europe to Africa and Asia, from engaging in simple motions to riding a bicycle, doing gymnastics, and performing martial arts, dance, and rituals. Though in the film's fit young bodies, reflecting classical models of beauty, we may identify a foreshadowing of the cult of the body later marking totalitarian propaganda, Prager and Kaufmann's film does nonetheless conform with the longstanding German tradition of *Körperkultur* (body culture) —reaching back to the 19th century—whose complex nature, being both repressive and emancipatory, was exhaustively studied by Karl Toepfer in "One Hundred Years of Nakedness in German Performance."[58] Ways to Strength and Beauty constitutes a deep exploration of the phenomenon of physical culture in Germany and of the *Nacktkultur* (culture of nakedness) born at the turn of the cen-

58 See Karl Toepfer, "One Hundred Years of Nakedness in German Performance," in *TDR* 47, 4 (T180; 2003), pp. 144–88.

tury: "the creation of teachers who, charged with implementing physical education programs, understood how difficult it was for people to learn to perfect their bodies without looking at them, without treating the body as the dominant aesthetic determinate of identity."[59]

By showing physical acts performed by nearly nude women and men, by de-eroticized (due to the idealized depiction of healthy and athletic corporality) though not genderless bodies, whose movements imitate the behavior of animals in nature, and above all by juxtaposing white bodies of Europeans with the vitality of African and Asian bodies, Prager portrayed the free and conscious body as a democratizing force as well as a critique of industrialized civilization.[60] Yet, more than anything, Ways to Strength and Beauty demonstrates the variety of forms, techniques, and schools of movement related to body culture—from those initiated by Émile Jaques-Dalcroze through Rudolf Laban and Mary Wigman. The film offers a priceless document on the history of the dance that flourished during the Weimar Republic, particularly in Berlin, and became one of the main domains of contemporary art after the First World War. In its exploration of the ties between sport and dance, it spotlighted the attributes of the two activities that tied them to mass phenomena and made them, as pointed out by Andrzej Gwóźdź, "the motor of a nascent industry but also an ideology of free time." Prager and Kaufmann's *Kulturfilm* is a testimony to the cultural shift taking place in Germany in the 1920s as the focus of research and cultural production prioritized body awareness over the soul.[61]

59 Ibid., p. 145.

60 This issue is addressed by Małgorzata Leyko's *Teatr w krainie utopii. Monte Verità, Mathildenhöhe, Hellerau, Goetheanum, Bauhaus* (Gdańsk: słowo/obraz terytoria, 2012).

61 See Andrzej Gwóźdź, "'Drogi do siły i piękna' albo o kulturze czasu wolnego w kinie Niemiec weimarskich," in *Kino niemieckie w dialogu pokoleń i kultur. Studia i szkice*, ed. Andrzej Gwoździ (Krakow: Rabid, 2004), p. 56.

In addition to its importance as an educational documentary, Ways to Strength and Beauty has one other interesting detail. In the film's fourteenth minute, during a series of outdoor gymnastic exercises, we see twenty-two-year-old Leni Riefenstahl, a young and promising dancer whose stage career would be derailed by a serious knee injury suffered in 1924.[62] Prior to her injury, dance was Riefenstahl's priority. It "offered a logical synthesis of her love of movement and physical training, and her strong drive for self-presentation and for an intense physical expression of her emotions."[63] After being sidelined as a dancer, her passion shifted to another mass medium—film, or more specifically the unique creation of the UFA: *Bergfilm*, the "mountain film." The genre's creator was Arnold Fanck, a geologist by profession and mountaineering enthusiast. Though Fanck had produced his first movie set in the mountains in 1913, it was not until the 1924 picture Der Berg des Schicksals (Mountain of Destiny) that he arrived at this unprecedented and short-lived film genre. These films were something of an amalgam of documentary and fiction, embedding fascinating nature imagery, skiing instruction, and mountaineering promotion in a melodramatic plot. At the same time the genre also offered a unique take on motion, as it uncovered in nature an energy, dynamism, and vitality, the human body, of which even at its most fit, is at best a dim reflection. Despite being

62 As a seventeen-year-old, being "too old" for a career in ballet, Riefenstahl enrolled in the famous Grimm-Reiter School of artistic dance and body culture, the alma mater of the Weimar Republic's foremost scandalmonger and the first actor to appear nude onstage, Anita Berber. Riefenstahl made her stage debut in 1921, and, to improve her versatility, enrolled in the school of Russian ballerina Eugenia Eduardova and the modern dance school of Jutta Klamt. Riefenstahl's debut as a solo dancer on October 23, 1923 in Munich was met with very positive reviews, thanks to which she was later invited by Max Reinhardt to perform as a soloist at the Deutsches Theater. Her dance career was cut short only six months later by the knee injury. See Jürgen Trimborn, *Leni Riefenstahl. A Life*, trans. Edna McCown, (London: Faber & Faber, 2007), pp. 13–24.

63 Ibid., p. 13.

seemingly strong and unbreakable, the body was depicted in mountain films as merely a phantom.

Leni Riefenstahl, upon seeing the poster for Mountain of Destiny, which shows the young actor Luis Trenker scaling a steep mountain, decided to become a star of the entirely male-dominated mountain film genre. Her work in this type of film prompted critics to coin a term "sports actor" for actors who did not require a stunt double. Riefenstahl was able to climb without a harness, to ski the most dangerous slopes, to be buried in avalanches, and to risk serious injury and frostbite. She flew in the face of convention by embodying both the accepted male construct of the "heroic I" and the stereotypical feminine character in Fanck's later melodramatic films,[64] which Susan Sontag, influenced by Kracauer's writings on Fanck, dubbed "pop-Wagnerian vehicles".[65]

The presence of a female body in these mountain films, challenging the abstract ideal of "masculinity," also questions the paradigm of the internalized male soldier, with his hardened body impervious to emotions and suffering, a body that, after World War I, became one giant prosthetic.[66] Moreover, also challenged was the traditional opposition of the tough, dry, and cold corporality of the soldier and the soft, moist, and warm physicality of women.[67] In this regard, particularly

64 Der heilige Berg (The Holy Mountain; 1925), Der grosse Sprung (The Big Jump; 1927), Die weisse Hölle von Piz Palü (The White Hell of Pitz Palü; 1929), Stürme über dem Mont Blanc (Avalanche; 1930), Der weisse Rausch (White Frenzy; 1931), and S.O.S Eisberg (S.O.S. Iceberg; 1933).

65 Susan Sontag, "Fascinating Fascism," in Susan Sontag, *Under the Sign of Saturn*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1981), p. 76.

66 See Sloterdijk, *Critique of Cynical Reason*, p. 457.

67 Such a binary distinction is put forth by Jonathan Littell in *Le sec et l'humide*, (Paris: Gallimard, 2008). Littell found inspiration in Klaus Theweleit's *Male Fantasies*, which was the first publication to portray fascism as a bodily condition. In his work, Theweleit analyzes hundreds of journals, memoirs, and stories written by World War I veterans (the so-called Freikorps literature of the 1920s), concentrating mainly on fantasies of radical male violence evoking clearly fascist ideals. In doing so, he exposes the means and methods used by male soldiers

noteworthy is The White Hell of Pitz Palü, undoubtedly Fanck's best alpine film and an international success. It combines spectacular feats by the sports actors at the base of the Morterratsch glacier, at nearly 4,000 meters above sea level and a temperature of close to minus 30 degrees Celsius, with simple yet well-constructed intrigue and storytelling.[68] Though on the surface The White Hell simply relies on the well-worn formula of a love triangle, merely relocated here to alpine environs and augmented with displays of physical prowess,[69] it is hard not to notice the trauma of the Great War lingering behind the melodramatic, and for some critics even pornographic, mountain film façade.[70]The obsessive search for the unburied dead, the yearning to return to the scene of a loved one's death, combined with a yearning for one's own death, extreme conditions exceeding the tolerance of ordinary humans, repeated nervous breakdowns, and finally bodies being trapped and frozen in the mountains are just a few of the recurring motifs in Fanck's film.

to eradicate in themselves any traces of soft, erotic, and emotional impulses by turning their own bodies into a cultural armor.

68 Finding shortcomings in the script and, above all, Fanck's inability to direct actors, Riefenstahl invited the accomplished director Georg Wilhelm Pabst and his writer Ladislaus Vajda to work on The White Hell of Pitz Palü.

69 This film's story of alpinist Dr. Johannes Krafft (Gustav Diessl), who had lost his wife ten years earlier in a climbing accident and, driven by guilt, regularly returns to the site, becomes the entry point to a story about another couple, Hans Bradt (Ernst Petersen) and Maria Maioni (Leni Riefenstahl). Still searching for his dead wife, Krafft becomes their guide at Pitz Palü, where the tragedy had taken place. As he rescues Hans from a fall, Krafft breaks his leg and the three are stranded in the high mountains as a blizzard approaches. Hans cannot take the tension—he has a nervous breakdown and wants to hurl himself from a cliff, but Maria and Krafft restrain him with ropes. Finally, after three days in the extreme physical and psychological conditions, the pilot Ernst Udet locates the missing climbers, but he is able to rescue only the couple. Krafft, having given his coat to the incapacitated Hans during the blizzard, freezes to death in a snow drift.

70 As early as the 1940s it was written that "The representation of nature [in the mountains films] arouses emotions similar to those aroused by pornography." Cited in Trimborn, *Leni Riefenstahl*, p. 35.

"In the survivors of the First World War, its dead did not come to rest,"[71] writes Sloterdijk. Mountain films are evidence that the opposite was also true. Among the sports actors were several former soldiers of the "front generation," including the artillery officer Luis Trenker (b. 1892) and the fighter pilot Ernst Udet (b. 1896).[72] Their involvement may be chalked up to a need for a postwar rebirth of fit and strong bodies, but it may also represent a need of those who survived the war to work through their relationship with those who perished. In fact this very subject was taken up by Trenker in his self-directed 1931 film Berge in Flammen (Mountains in Flames), inspired by real events in Trenker's life. It recounts the friendship of two young men from the mountains, an Austrian and an Italian, who found themselves on opposing sides at the outbreak of the war. Unlike the films and other artworks that reproduce the pre-fascist phantasm of the violence of radical masculinity, Trenker's picture tells the story of the emotions and suffering of ordinary soldiers.

The connection of the survivors with the dead, crucial to the postwar experience of German society and so evident in mountain films, nonetheless was not acknowledged by the author of *From Caligari to Hitler*. In *The Mass Ornament*, a collection of essays from the 1920s and '30s, Kracauer urges that we analyze "[t]he position that an epoch occupies in the historical process" on the basis of "its inconspicuous surface-level expressions," rather than "from that epoch's judgments about itself."[73] While he offers a masterful description of the phenomenon of the dancing Tiller Girls as a capitalist product of entertainment fac-

71 Sloterdijk, *Critique of Cynical Reason*, p. 419.

72 Quite interesting in this context is Fanck's own relationship to both the mountains and the war: he developed a fascination with amateur mountain photography when he was sent to the mountains as a child for relief from asthma, and it was his asthma that disqualified him from the army draft in 1914.

73 Siegfried Kracauer, *The Mass Ornament*, trans., ed., and intro. Thomas Y. Levin (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1995), p. 75.

tories, he seems to have lost the sociological incisiveness that characterized his essays from the 1920s in his take on *Bergfilme*. Looking back through the prism of the nightmare that was World War II, and of the individual biographies of Riefenstahl, Trenker, and Fanck, all of whom went along with fascism, it's surprising that Kracauer fails to notice in the mountain films the presence of former soldiers in the mountains, where the realities of the Great War often played out, nor does he comment on the female body as it occupies strictly male territory.

Kracauer's remarks on the subject of mountain films are limited to mere suggestions that their pro-Nazi tendencies and pre-fascist aesthetics become apparent in the coinciding monumentality and sentimentality of his depiction of the mountains. He does, admittedly, take note of the documentary value in Arnold Fanck's films, even calling them "incomparable achievements"[74] of their time compared to other films, which relied solely on scale models. Nevertheless, in his bottom line on the subject of mountain films, Kracauer believes them to perform "a kind of heroic idealism" and to be "the rites of cult."[75] For him, they seemed to be a product of the peculiar religious cult surrounding the conquering of mountains—both in the literal and figurative sense—in Germany at that time.[76] Storm over Mont Blanc confirms this assessment for him, as he likens the majestic images of clouds during Ernst Udet's acrobatic flights to shots in the opening sequence of Triumph of the Will (1936), where "similar cloud masses surround Hitler's airplane on its flight to Nuremberg," thereby attesting to the "ultimate fusion of the mountain cult and the Hitler cult."[77] Kracauer's hypothesis is further legitimized by the fact that one of the film's stars, Leni Riefenstahl, was not only an actor in

74 Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler*, p. 111.
75 Ibid.
76 See Ibid., p. 112.
77 Ibid., p. 258.

Fanck's films but also a director herself, symbolically initiating and concluding her directorial career with her own mountain film projects: Das blaue Licht (The Blue Light; 1932) and Tiefland (Lowlands; 1954).

With The Blue Light—which she also produced, wrote, edited, and starred in as a young woman from the mountains persecuted by society for allegedly being a witch—Riefenstahl secured for herself a place in cinema history. Lowlands, meanwhile, a film adaptation of Eugen d'Albert and Rudolf Lothar's opera set in the Pyrenees, put an end to her film career for good. Shot between 1940 and 1944, the film incited a moral and consequently legal backlash as Riefenstahl—though never admitting it herself—cast in the roles of Spaniards about one hundred "southern-looking" Roma from the Maxglan concentration camp outside of Salzburg. Riefenstahl's Nazi past, coupled with that unprecedented allegation, effectively cut short any future activity in the film industry.

Yet, for Riefenstahl, this professional death became the seed for a new life, which turned out to be an interesting repeat of sorts—a return to her interwar fascination with the body's biological recovery and the body as the source of cultural regeneration. In the spirit of the Weimar Republic's vitalism and activism, and the cognitive and educational passion of *Kulturfilme*, Riefenstahl, in the 1950s, discovered a new land for herself—Africa.[78] In the early 1960s she traveled to Sudan, where she became the first white woman to live among the Nuba. Over several subsequent visits to the Nuba Mountains, she passionately—and always with a camera in hand—observed the customs and rituals of the "black athletes," as she called the muscular, white-ash-covered Nuba wrestlers. The result of her contact with the Nuba tribespeople, for whom the body was a symbol of absolute beauty, was a series of ethnographic-anthro-

78 In 1956, she began work in Kenya and Sudan on a film titled Black Cargo about the slave trade, which was interrupted by a serious automobile accident.

pological albums and a number of unreleased films capturing the paintings that adorn the nude bodies of the Nuba people of Kau and the ritual dances of Nuba Masakin-Quisar warriors—all with the body of a white woman roving amongst them. In the photographs collected in *The Last of the Nuba*, Susan Sontag noticed a trace of continuity with the earlier ideological work of the creator of *Triumph of the Will*, making itself apparent above all in the book's "primitivist ideal" through its depiction of "a people subsisting in a pure harmony with their environment, untouched by 'civilization.'"[79]

However, the matter does need a bit of qualification: the glorification and celebration of the primitive, whose origins undoubtedly lay in a "preoccupation with situations of control, submissive behavior, and extravagant effort [... endorsing] two seemingly opposite states, egomania and servitude,"[80] was not only a feature of the Nazi regime but also of European modernism. The roots of Nazi violence lie in nineteenth-century Europe[81]—in a center of imperialism and colonialism, which became a cultural and political laboratory for racism. This connection between Nazi ideology and Western modernity can therefore be interpreted as a dark side of the Anthropology of the moderns.[82] Looking at it from this perspective, Riefenstahl's white body—as a peculiar site of Western modern history being repeated—joining the black male warriors' choreography sets the stage for a necroperformance of what was subsequently repressed from history: of an "ambiguous self" shaped by the experience of the "front" in the Great War.

79 Sontag, "Fascinating Fascism", p. 86.
80 Ibid., 91.
81 See Enzo Traverso, *The Origins of Nazi Violence*, trans. Janet Lloyd (New York: New Press, 2003).
82 See Bruno Latour, *An Inquiry into Modes of Existence: An Anthropology of the Moderns*, trans. Catherine Porter, (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2013).

The Proletarianization of the Female Body

The body of Leni Riefenstahl constitutes a unique and paradox-laden document of cultural history. This is the body of a woman who on the one hand embodies the abstract idea of *Stahlnatur*—a human of steel-like constitution, a tough and unbreakable man/soldier who became the cornerstone of the armed nation—and on the other offers real evidence of women's emancipation through the modern social reform sweeping the Western world after 1918. In Germany the interwar years meant not only the development of the phantasmatic "megasubject," who, as Sloterdijk argues, transformed the sovereign entity into an object of manipulation by Nazi power[83]; these years were also a time of great social and economic problems, articulated in the films of the 1920s and early '30s. "The rapid succession of crises that overtook the Weimar Republic, the short-windedness of the recovery and the bitterness of the battles over the distribution of national resources"[84] led not only to the great economic recession but also to the dramatic disintegration of social and cultural constructs, including the position of women. This was the beginning of the period known as the Great Depression, whose stage ultimately became the female body. Riefenstahl represented one extreme of the deep changes sweeping German society after the war: she was a radical incarnation of the "new woman," who refused all traditional female roles and with her self-sufficiency could replace a man in his social and cultural position. Situated at the other extreme was a figure that constituted a radical antithesis to the "phallic woman," namely the figure of the working-class or petit-bourgeois pregnant woman, who towards the end of the 1920s rose to become a true "icon of the crisis."[85]

83 See Sloterdijk, *Critique of Cynical Reason*, p. 434.

84 Peukert, *The Weimar Republic*, p. 107.

85 Ursula von Keitz, *Im Schatten des Gesetzes. Schwangerschaftskonflikt und Reproduktion im deutschsprachigen Film 1918–1933* (Marburg: Schüren Verlag, 2005), p. 13.

As Ursula von Keitz argues, a fundamental role in establishing the body of the pregnant woman as the stage for the representation of the postwar socioeconomic crisis was played by hybrid, semi-documentary film forms having close intermedia ties with the era's documentary photography, melodramatic film, and 1920s political art, as well as with the period's scientific discourse, particularly in the fields of medicine, law, and anthropology.[86] At the same time Keitz points out the novelty of imagery depicting pregnant women, claiming that, other than in ethnographic study, pregnancy was either an entirely unrepresented subject in European art prior to the First World War, or—as in the case of Alfred Kubin or Edvard Munch—served as a symbol of the disintegration of the female body, which male artists showed as something hollowed out, drained, and killed.

> In no way did pre-1920s visual art offer to any extent an iconographic reservoir to be referenced by filmmakers who wished to depict pregnancy as a sign of the crisis. But, towards the end of the 1920s, we do observe an intense interaction between different media: photography, film, and fine art. The focus of the socially critical camera on the female belly is a departure from conventional representation; it documents a "new way of looking" at the "stage" of the crisis, shattering the boundaries of shame.[87]

Keitz traces the presence of pregnant women in German cinema beginning with films from just after the war,[88] through

86 The image of the proletarian or petit bourgeois pregnant woman originally began to appear in documentary photography, especially in workers' periodicals or those concerned with radical social issues, such as *Arbeiter Ilustrierte Zeitung* or *Der Arbeiterphotograph*, as well as in visual arts. An early manifestation of this was an exhibition titled *Frauen in Not* (Women in Crisis), which included work by Käthe Kollwitz, Otto Dix, and Marc Chagall among others.

87 von Keitz, *Im Schatten des Gesetzes*, p. 11.

88 Georg Jacoby's Keimendes Leben (Sprouting Life,1918), Richard Oswald's Sündige Mutter (Sinful Mother, 1918), Walter Creutz's Arme kleine Eva (Poor Little Eva,1918), and Moral und Sinnlichkeit (Morality and Sensuality, 1919).

films from the Weimar Republic,[89] all the way up to films from the era of the Great Depression.[90] By way of a detailed reconstruction and analysis of these largely obscure, partially surviving, or entirely lost films (with the exception of the last two, which have entered the canon of film history), Keitz is able to show how the new genre arising during the Great War, the *Aufklärungsfilm*, was revived in the interventional films of the Weimar Republic, mainly as an effective instrument in the propagation of reformist ideas in the field of sexuality. So it is not surprising that after the first spate of films produced directly in the context of the Great War, a second wave of such movies occurred after 1925, just as the parliamentary debate surrounding Paragraph 218 and the legalization of abortion was in full swing in Germany. Also growing in intensity was the movement for sexual reform, calling for the abolition of penalties for various sexual activities, for distributing and using contraception, and for mass-scale education on sex in general—on matters like deriving pleasure from sex and the right to self-determination (especially with respect to women) regarding one's needs and the means of fulfilling them.

One of the most interesting examples of the connections between emancipation, education, and abortion was Martin Berger's film Kreuzzug des Weibes (The Wife's Crusade), which premiered in Berlin on October 1, 1926, and was well received by the public despite negative reviews from critics.

89 Martin Berger's Kreuzzug des Weibes (The Women's Crusade, 1926), Kurt Bernhardt's Kinderseelen klagen euch an (Children's Souls Accuse You, 1927), Jacob and Luise Fleck's Frauenarzt Dr. Schäfer (Gynecologist Dr. Schäfer, 1928), and Franz Hofer's Madame Lu, die Frau für diskrete Beratung (Madame Lu, the Woman for Discreet Counseling,1929).

90 Karl Heinz Wolf's Der Sittenrichter (Moral Jugde, 1929), Johannes Meyer's *Eine von uns* (One of Us, 1932), Eduardo Tissé's Frauennot – Frauenglück (Women's Misery, Women's Happiness, 1930), Hans Tintner's Cyankali – §218 [1930] and, finally, Bertolt Brecht and Slatan Dudow's Kuhle Wampe oder Wem gehört die Welt? (Kuhle Wampe or Who Owns the World?, 1932/33).

Berger's picture relies equally on melodrama and on the educational film model developed by Oswald as it grapples with the consequences of a specific piece of legislation and imbues the story with purely discursive elements. This is achieved by a unique approach in representing the main players involved in the debate on Paragraph 218—a doctor, a prosecutor, and pregnant women from a range of social classes. Of vital importance was the portrayal of the class and social differences separating the "actors" of this social drama and of the resulting drastic consequences in the law's enforcement.[91] The film also includes direct references to specific medical and legal docu-

91 The film opens with the story of a working-class family living in poverty in the back of a big-city tenement building—a married couple with four children, whose first son has died during the war and who are expecting another child. The woman decides to have an abortion, for medical reasons as well as economic and social ones, as she is told by her doctor that there is a high probability of disability due to her age. The doctor, however, does not offer her a legal, professional abortion, though he does so for a much wealthier couple. After being refused an abortion by the doctor, the woman talks to the building's door-lady, who lives on the ground floor in the front part of the tenement with her handicapped son. The door-lady convinces her to perform the abortion herself, which results in complications that eventually lead to her death. A prosecutor arrives to arrest the husband, who has been left to take care of their four children. Witnessing the husband's apprehension is a young high school teacher who lives in the building, who in vain tries to convince her fiancé, the prosecutor, to release the man. Having done his duty and now wanting to repair his relationship, the prosecutor sends his fiancée a gift basket, which is delivered to the door-lady's home. Her son quickly drinks the bottle of champagne from the basket and takes the rest of its contents to the teacher's apartment. There, drunk, he rapes her. The teacher tells no one, but soon discovers she is pregnant and visits a doctor for help. The doctor seeks the advice of the prosecutor regarding an anonymous pregnancy resulting from rape and argues that penalties for abortions are inhumane, citing the Malthusian law of population. The prosecutor, however, remains unwavering in his convictions. When he learns that the woman in question is in fact his fiancée, he rushes to the building and incredulously questions her innocence, after which he throws the door-lady's son down the stairs. Back in his office, the prosecutor has a vision of all of the women who have died from illegal abortions, among whom he sees his fiancée. As a consequence he steps down from his post and goes back to her. The plot summary is based on a reconstruction by the film scholar Ursula von Keitz in von Keitz, *Im Schatten des Gesetzes*, pp. 160–61.

ments, like Malthus's 1798 *Essay on Population*, extremely significant among reformers promoting sexual awareness, which was read out by the doctor during the legal hearing scene.

At the same time, on the visual level, Berger eagerly employs techniques from German expressionist film, especially evident in the film's closing scene of a procession of dead women killed by illegal abortions and in the visualization of a woman's fears, in which dozens of unidentified hands reach for her nude body. The expressionist storytelling approach also becomes apparent in the creation of a space by accentuating its geometry, the preference for showing interiors over exteriors, and the juxtaposition of contrasting bodily traits (the prosecutor's slim, dry and stiff "military" body; the soft, bulging and obese body of the young man; the working woman's body sapped by poverty and multiple pregnancies; and the well-groomed body of the teacher). Finally, the film's similarities to expressionist cinema are further reinforced by the appearance of several big stars of German cinema—Conrad Veidt, Werner Krauß, Maly Delschaft, and Harry Lidtke, whose masterful acting anchors many of the scenes and lends authenticity to the portrayal of corporeality as a site of the performance of cultural norms.

It is through the "uncivilized" vitality of the man with a mental disability, played by Werner Krauß (known for his role as Dr. Caligari), that Berger is most effective in relating a "norm-defying" otherness: in close-ups he shows the man's facial expressions and gestures, his use of his hands while eating, the relish with which he licks his lips, his exaggerated orality, his auto-eroticism, his elevated sex drive, and his yearning to be touched. Socially rejected and repressed, the man reins in his sexuality until ultimately acting out under the influence of the alcohol. The orgiastic scene—whose references to Bacchic iconography are aptly pointed out by Keitz—ends with the teacher being raped and becoming pregnant. The film depicts the handicapped man as in an extreme state of "animalization." Von Keitz also notices that before he brutally forces himself on the teacher,

she first looks directly into the camera, which establishes a connection between the horrified woman and the viewer.[92] Yet there is another way to interpret this crucial shot: it is the moment of identification between the viewer and the young man, who under the influence of the alcohol commits a brutal sexual assault.

Assuming such a perspective in this figure of a man subjected to forced sexual abstinence we can identify the experience of the Great War soldier. The behavior of the young male character in Berger's film recalls the writing of Magnus Hirschfeld on the consequences of frontline morality, which—indifferent to natural human needs—forced a strict sexual discipline on the soldiers. There were a variety of ways in which they would discharge their sexual desire, ranging from tolerated masturbation, softcore pornographic drawings, and lewd anecdotes and limericks, to tattoos of sexual symbols, sodomy, homosexual activity among heterosexual men, all the way to uncontrolled ejaculation, the rape of women, and sex with animals.[93]

The complex intermingling of the corporality and sexuality of a disabled man and, from Berger's perspective, the uncontrollable nature of male sexual desire and female feminity, and by extension the perspective of the film viewer, makes it possible, in my opinion, to understand both the reason for Kracauer's dismissal of Weimar Republic popular cinema and Sloterdijk's omission of the newfound physical presence and sexual freedom of women in society at this point in time. The otherness explored on many levels in Berger's film—the proletarian or petit-bourgeois pregnant woman, a person with mental disability, and finally the mass viewer—occupies an abject position in a culture represented by male members of the intellectual elite. This position prevents them from noticing that cultural otherness—equated with pathological corporality—was something of a flipside of the *Stahlnatur* idea gaining traction at that time.

92 von Keitz, *Im Schatten des Gesetzes*, p. 173.
93 See *Sittengeschichte des Ersten Weltkrieges*, pp. 139–70.

The vitality of the Weimar Republic not only resulted in the transformation of an idle mass into an obedient nation; it also found a reflection in the figure of the class-conscious proletariat as an Other collective subject.

> Yet World War I in no way *solved* the growing contradiction between economy and politics throughout the capitalist world. True, Germany was defeated, but not so decisively as to eliminate her from the race for world leadership. And the war had opened the door for a new arrival: socialist revolution.[94]

Perhaps I should put it more bluntly: it was only the arrival of the new subject—the working-class woman, bearing children in extremely difficult conditions—that radically exposed the postwar socioeconomic crisis and the need for sexual reform. The image of just such a woman led to a specific reevaluation in the public sphere. Thanks to the pregnant proletarian, what had been covered up and private in the climate of *Stahlnatur* now rose up as an alternative visibility, dialectically struggling for priority. It is therefore no wonder that a significant point of reference in the abortion debate in Germany was a piece of legislation passed in postrevolutionary Russia on November 18, 1920. Establishing "motherhood as a social responsibility," the law not only rendered abortion non-punishable but also called for the creation of help centers for pregnant women, social-outreach programs for single mothers, and conditions under which child-raising and work would be compatible.

In Kreuzzug des Weibes, the political aspect of the fight for the right to choose on matters of one's own body and fate, as faced by the proletarian woman—who, being refused the procedure by the doctor, attempts to do it herself, with tragic consequences—becomes little more than a pretext and context for the story of the teacher. Yet in later Great Depression

94 Mandel, *The Meaning of the Second World War*, p. 12.

era films addressing abortion, the proletarianized woman's body became the central point of reference for filmmakers with political leanings that veered from militarism and capitalism.

"The capitalist economy masks and deforms female nature, and for that reason, female nature can thrive unencumbered and without limitation only in communism,"[95] argues Friedrich Wolf, a physician and the author of *Cyankali*, the most famous theatre play of the interwar period to address the cruelty and fallacy of Paragraph 218. The premiere of Wolf's drama, directed by Hans Hinrich, took place on September 6, 1929, at the Lessingtheater in Berlin.[96] The play was a success and enjoyed great popular acclaim, attested to by its attendance statistics (over a four-month run, there were more than 100 sold-out shows), as well as by the ensuing tour from mid-January to mid-April 1930, with performances in Magdeburg, Halle, Bonn, Stuttgart, Bremen, Gdańsk, Kaliningrad, Zurich, and Basel. In many cities the play was met with protests and reports of scandals provoked by activists from the Nazi Party and by Catholic youth. Following the play's polarizing and highly emotional run of performances in German-speaking cities, it embarked on a tour of the Soviet Union on April 29, 1930, and eventually reached Poland thanks to Leon Schiller's adaptation at the Municipal Theatre in Łódź.[97] The protest that greeted the Łódź performance

95 Cited in von Keitz, *Im Schatten des Gesetzes*, p. 318.

96 Also interested in Wolf's play was Erwin Piscator, who was nonetheless denied the rights by the author. Piscator, just a few weeks after the premiere of *Cyankali*, directed Carl Credé's *Gequälte Menschen (§ 218)* at the Apollo Theater in Mannheim, in which (unlike in Wolf's play, where the protagonist is a pregnant woman) the issue centered on the dilemma of a doctor forced to choose between helping his patients and being free of oppression from the police and the prosecution.

97 In the summer of 1930 the play was relocated to the Capitol Theatre in Warsaw. Anna Kuligowska-Korzeniewska writes on the specifics of both versions of the play in her essay "'Gazy trujące.' Cjankali w Teatrze Miejskim w Łodzi i Teatrze Capitol w Warszawie," in *Faktomontaże Leona Schillera*, ed. Anna Kuligowska-Korzeniewska (Warsaw: Instytut Teatralny im. Zbigniewa Raszewskiego, 2015), pp. 131–70.

quickly escalated from verbal invectives to real physical aggression from "unidentified perpetrators" who threw vials of tear gas and shouted "Away with pornography! Away with Adwentowicz [director of the Municipal Theatre in Łódź]! Away with Bolshevism!"[98]

Wolf's play was based on a film format quite familiar to viewers of the day, one that combined melodramatic and didactic threads, as well as fiction and documentary techniques. *Cyankali* is the story of Hete Fent, a young woman working in a factory and living in a poor Berlin neighborhood who is denied an abortion by a doctor and attempts to do it herself. It ends tragically: Hete gets an infection and fever, whereupon she visits an old woman who gives her poison, which causes Hete's condition to deteriorate further and ultimately kills her. Her mother is implicated as an accomplice and jailed.[99] Nonetheless, it was because of Wolf's communist beliefs (he was a member of the Communist Party of Germany from 1928) that, despite its extreme pessimism, the play—set in the world of the working class and concentrating solely on the tragic choices of women— portrays the main character not as a helpless victim but as a class-conscious woman fighting for the right to self-determination. The turning point in Hete's life is the botched abortion she performs on herself in the back room of a newsstand, whose owner, Kuckuck, offers shelter to the shunned and persecuted. It is here that Hete is given an "implement" and attempts to terminate the pregnancy, drowned out by "the loud cries of the newsagent and the sounds of the street."[100] This intimate tragedy of a singular woman is depicted by Wolf as being entirely determined by external social and economic factors. Not without reason does the scene unfold at the peak

98 See ibid., p. 146.
99 See Friedrich Wolf, *Cyankali* (Berlin: Internationaler Arbeiter-Verlag, 1929).
100 Ibid., p. 66.

of commercial activity, as men fall into a kind of ecstatic automation, hurrying to work in the "rush hour" and delivering themselves to "wild sale,"[101] and as the whole frenetic world rushes through the shop via the newspaper headlines. Hete's journey appears as something of a woman's terrifying odyssey, during which, yearning for her subjectivity to be acknowledged, she resorts to any and all means available to a woman of her class, which ultimately prove to be nothing more than acts of violence against herself. Accepting her defeat, the dying Hete asks about other proletarian women denied options available to their wealthy counterparts: "Thousands … must … die … (*in morbid fear*). Help us … because no-one … (*she collapses onto the cushions*)."[102]

This revolutionary aspect of the female figure did not fully come through in the film adaptation of Wolf's play, directed in 1930 by Hans Tintner. Wolf, nonetheless, committed himself fully to working with the director, as he was convinced of film's greater political potential:

> I believe in the film; but it must be realistic through and through, simple, direct, without embellishments or grandiose acting […]. If it is properly shot, it can have a stronger impact than the play, reaching medium-sized and small towns. But it must be absolutely precise, clear and pure in its message![103]

Though the subversive side of the character of Hete was obscured by the symbolic approach to telling the story—especially in the second part of the young woman's odyssey, in which her body, subjected to the unsuccessful and dangerous operation, moves in a mechanical, nearly somnambulistic rhythm, while her mind becomes ever more preoccupied by visions of

101 Ibid.
102 Ibid., p. 93.
103 Cited in von Keitz, *Im Schatten des Gesetzes*, p. 325.

objects that gain supremacy and control over her body—the film's documentary style is reinforced by data superimposed over the narrative and interrupting the epic tale: quotations of various legal acts, miscarriage statistics, the death rate of women having illegal abortions, and information on workers' strikes and demonstrations by the unemployed. The documentary data pertaining to social life jibes with the drastic portrayal of the living conditions faced by the protagonist's neighbors, the utterly destitute Witt family. Particular significance is acquired by the sequence leading up to the suicide of Mrs. Witt—a mother of six, once again pregnant, having been raped by her husband—who is styled here in the manner of the poor proletarian mothers depicted in illustrations and photographs of 1920s workers' presses.[104]

While Tintner's Cyankali retained the patina of an educational film, as it combined sexual awareness with a "deterrent aesthetic"[105] and a dramatic approach to addressing the issue of abortion, the 1932 film Kuhle Wampe oder Wem gehört die Welt? (Kuhle Wampe or Who Owns the World?) was a more straightforward documentary, free of melodrama and psychologising. Chiefly responsible for this was undoubtedly the film's director, Slatan Dudow, who had made a documentary on the inhumane living conditions of laborers in Berlin, titled Wie der Berliner Arbeiter wohnt (How the Berliner Worker Lives), inspired by photo essays running in workers' newspapers.[106] Kuhle Wampe was Dudow's rendition of the story of Annie Bönike, a sexually aware and class-conscious working woman from a petit-bourgeois family in Berlin, deep in the throes of the international economic crisis. The film's formula is made clear from the introductory scene, a montage of images of the industrialized city and headlines from newspapers informing

104 See ibid., p. 340.
105 Ibid., p. 361.
106 See ibid., p. 350.

viewers of the skyrocketing unemployment rate.[107] A subplot to this probe into the living conditions of Berlin workers is established in the opening scene: the growing rate of depression is a direct result of high unemployment and low wages, which drive Annie's brother to commit suicide. The debt-laden family is forced to leave their home.

The rampant joblessness and homelessness are not meant to invoke a sense of sympathy toward the plight of the desperate citizens; on the contrary, the film aims to incite revolt and social change. Embodying this is the titular Kuhle Wampe, a weekend retreat on the outskirts of Berlin, situated in a forest on Lake Mueggelsee, presented as a place harboring the "last hope of finding work."[108] It is there, thanks to the intervention of Annie's boyfriend, Fritz, that the homeless Bönike family relocates to try and begin a new life. This is also where Annie will inform her parents that she is pregnant. This crucial storyline is introduced on two levels simultaneously. Shots of the scene unfolding inside the tent are interspersed with shots of nature: a tree, symbolizing a phallus, and soil, a metaphor for the female body, which—as we hear in the song "Das Spiel der Geschlechter erneuert sich im Frühjahr" (The Game of the Sexes Returns Every Spring) wafting in as Helene Weigel sings from off-camera—"welcomes what is new, without caution." The pleasure derived from sex and the naturalness of conception are then contrasted with the realities of urban life in a poignant scene inside the factory, where the pregnant Annie sits with other women on a production line, performing dangerous tests on electrical devices. The vitality of nature is juxtaposed with the mechanical work of the urban female bodies, which

107 The last frames of the film's exposition show 5 million unemployed in Germany and 315 thousand in Berlin alone, of whom 100 thousand have no social assistance whatsoever.

108 These words appear in the film at the entry gate to the camp. Kuhle Wampe, established in 1913 as a site for 10 to 20 tents, grew so large that, at the time of the Great Depression, it held 93 tents housing more than 3,000 people.

are subjected to alienation. It is also not without reason that Dudow makes nature the setting for a workers' sports fair, in which the physical social activity of the proletariat is in counterpoint to the political passivity of the bourgeoisie. Taking part in the events are about 4,000 worker-athletes—members of various proletarian organizations like Fichte Sportklub, the Workers' Theatre Company or the Greater Berlin Workers' Choir.[109]

Dudow's use of the revolutionary potential of sport and music reveals the great ideological influence of one of the film's co-writers, Bertolt Brecht.[110] In Kuhle Wampe, traces of the *Dreigroschenoper* (Threepenny Opera; 1928) are evident, especially a strategy of imparting ideological content, which Brecht worked out in his didactic plays between 1929 and 1931. (It was no coincidence that one of Brecht's main collaborators on *Lehrstücke*, Hans Eisler, was invited to contribute to the film.) Brecht's input can clearly be seen in the use of songs that not only add commentary on the scenes but also infuse them with purely political messages ("Das Spiel der Geschlechter erneuert sich im Frühjahr" or the "Solidaritäts-Song"), as well as in dramatic scenes of the train trip back from the festival, written by Brecht alone. Here, Annie, Fritz, and several other workers have an open political discussion on the subject of the economic crisis with some wealthy townspeople, who are evidently uneasy about the heightened presence of the collective body on public transport. In response to the question of who is still capable of changing the world, the proletarian woman says: "Those who are not happy with it." This sets the stage for the suggestion of impending revolution in the film's final shot, which shows throngs of dissatisfied and physically fit workers marching to change the world.

109 See Kłys, *Od Mabusego do Goebbelsa*, p. 91.
110 Also involved in writing the screenplay were Ernst Ottwald and Slatan Dudow.

There is little doubt that Kuhle Wampe's writing and editing were also strongly informed by the revolutionary films of Sergei Eisenstein, in particular his Strike (1924), Battleship Potemkin (1925), and October (1927). This inspiration reveals itself most clearly in the film's division into chapters that are not defined—as they are in traditional silent films—by the beginning and end of a particular act, but rather constitute a kind of epic commentary on the events portrayed in a given sequence.

> This principle is adopted by Brecht and Dudow in the segmentation of *Kuhle Wampe* as they divide the story using chapter titles like "One fewer worker," "The Beautiful Life of a Young Person" or "To Whom Does the World Belong?" Of course, the editing here serves not only to stimulate empathy in the viewer but also provides bitterly sarcastic commentary on the worth of man in the material world.[111]

This ironic take on workers' alienation in the capitalist world comes to an end with a message that, paradoxically, would be quite out of character for Eisenstein: the demonstration of workers' solidarity on the city train does not lead to catastrophe and failure but offers a vision for the future—of the possibility of changing the world. This is to take place at the hands of the active subject of history, the people, which in Kuhle Wampe are portrayed in a manner that emancipates them and highlights their unity.[112]

111 von Keitz, *Im Schatten des Gesetzes*, p. 353.

112 Georges Didi-Huberman points out that, in analyzing images of people, "one must go further and ask whether the form of such an exposure—framing, montage, editing, rhythm, narration, and so on—encloses them (that is alienates them and, finally, exposes them to disappearance) or whether it frees them (by exposing them to appear before us, giving them a power of appearance or apparition)." Georges Didi-Huberman, "People exposed, people as extras," in *Radical Philosophy* 156 (July/Aug, 2009).

The revolutionary potential identified in the working class meant that, even before its first screenings for the German public, Kuhle Wampe was flagged by censors as a tendentious communist film. Interestingly, the censors' intervention mainly targeted the storyline of Annie's pregnancy, which ultimately resulted in the removal of the off-camera reading of Paragraph 218 and in the elimination of the money drive that the worker-athletes at the festival organized in a gesture of solidarity to raise funds for Annie's abortion. The censors' interference in Kuhle Wampe clearly demonstrates that the true threat to the postwar reality was the era's new subject—the sexually-aware and class-conscious proletarian woman heralding radical changes in German statehood.

> The message in the film's events and its visual dimension was to rouse in the masses a distrust of the state, to point out that the only real help can come from themselves as the state, in its current form, is incapable of helping and therefore deserves to be brought down. A film that in such an impactful manner [...] undermines the authority of the state in the fight against poverty and indigence shakes the very essence of the state built on a foundation of a republican-democratic constitution.[113]

Social Documentary Dramaturgy

The fight against "the greatest crime of penal law," as Paragraph 218 was described by some progressive scholars,[114] not only limited to Germany, as movements for abortion law reform were rising up throughout Europe, Poland included. A standout piece of documentation on the Polish debate on abor-

113 "Erstes Verbot des Films," in *Kuhle Wampe oder Wem gehört die Welt? Filmprotokoll und Materialien*, eds. Wolfgang Gersch and Werner Hecht (Leipzig: Verlag Philipp Reclam, 1971), p. 124.
114 Boy-Żeleński, *Piekło kobiet*, p. 1.

tion was a famous collection of op-ed pieces by Tadeusz Boy-Żeleński, written between October and December 1929 and subsequently published in pamphlet form, titled *Piekło Kobiet* (Women's Hell) in 1930. This publication, reprinted multiple times throughout the twentieth century, points to the decisive influence of the German campaign on the discussions taking place in Poland. It describes the large-scale opposition to Paragraph 218 by the German population, names specific works by German reformers, and cites examples of drastic legal cases to buttress Boy-Żeleński's argument for the need to abolish penalties for abortion.[115] The main line of his argument points to a criticism of militarism and capitalism as deeply interrelated political systems, whose shortcomings manifest specifically in the revocation of a woman's right to choose.

> [...C]oncealed beneath the euphemistic name of "population policy" is usually militarism and "cannon fodder." But the issue of "cannon fodder" changes depending on the conditions of the given war. The next war—if we can even entertain the thought of Europe ever allowing such mass suicide again—will be an industrial war, a scientific, chemical and bacterial war; one that won't be decided by the amount of available cannon fodder. In this lies an extremely important point: even if a surplus population was necessary for war purposes, then that surplus population would call for new areas for expansion as increased population density creates crowding, which yearns for new markets and demands bloodshed. Thus it can be said that an excess

115 For instance, Boy-Żeleński cites an excerpt of a court physician's report from Stefan Glaser's article "Kilka uwag o spędzeniu płodu, which allows the author of Women's Hell" to formulate his argument on the need to establish rape as legal grounds for abortion in the new law: "A ten-year-old girl abused sexually by her stepfather becomes pregnant. The hospital doctors as well as the heads of the university women's health clinic all refuse to help her, citing Paragraph 218 of the German criminal code. Equally futile is an appeal to the Ministry of Justice. The child is forced to carry the pregnancy to term." Boy-Żeleński, *Piekło kobiet*, p. 30; see Stefan Glaser, "Kilka uwag o spędzeniu płodu ze stanowiska prawa karnego," in *Rocznik Prawniczy Wileński* 2 (1928), pp. 1–44.

> of human matter is necessary for a war provoked by none other than that excess itself. Can anything be more barbarically idiotic? So the regulation of population growth, which is ever more the subject of discussion, would make for a powerful factor in favor of pacifism. The defenders of the "regulation" movement in Germany emphatically accentuate that aspect.[116]

Standing in opposition to the population policy, the issue of self-regulation of childbirth, under the influence of the German debate on abortion, becomes a political program in support of pacifism, in support of "acknowledging the rights of other nations, and the harmonious co-existence of races," as an alternative to the mobilization of society in anticipation of the next war. Population policy, which works by generating fears of depopulation among the citizenry, cites the ideology of population growth as a requirement for overcoming the consequences of the First World War but conceals the real effects of uncontrolled reproduction, especially among the working class and the urban poor:

> For a long time now, there has been talk of the catastrophic effects of unrestrained reproduction in poor households, particularly in cities. A family that is too large creates squalor, filth, crowding, ignorance, and shamelessness, because everything is crammed together, which leads on a direct path to incest, a common occurrence in such conditions; to moral licentiousness, hatred, despair and the inability to think about a way out because childbirth, baptisms, illnesses, and deaths consume everything else. The home becomes a hell; the thirty-year-old wife is an ailing, old woman, physically repulsive; the husband, drowning in the cries of brats, seeing his wife either pregnant or breastfeeding, or both at the same time, escapes to the tavern, where, with his drunkenness, he exacerbates the family's misery. Cultural needs are forgotten; there arises a state of hopelessness and despondency, a vulnerability

116 Boy-Żeleński, *Piekło kobiet*, p. 43

> to all forms of evil prompts. That is the reality of God's blessing unrestrained, a reality whose correction is said by many to be the "destruction of the family!" Meanwhile, there is no greater enemy to the family than excessive reproduction.[117]

Boy-Żeleński's argument demonstrates well the connectedness of biopower and necropolitics within the issue of abortion. While the former involves the interference of the authorities in one's life, the latter relates to the conditions determining the formulation of the right to decide who lives and who dies. Writing about specific cases of proletarian women and those belonging to privileged classes,[118] Boy-Żeleński reveals the hypocrisy of population policy in its supposed benefit to the entire nation and its defense of human life. In his take on the matter, population policy is shown to be a surreptitious form of necropolitics, whose aim is the "total instrumentation of human existence and a material destruction of human bodies and the population."[119]

The radical sociopolitical interventionism Boy-Żeleński describes in his collection of essays did not, however, spur a mass movement or revolution in interwar Poland. He did, however, identify a certain potential in Poland's unique legislative blank slate, writing that "normally, laws are inherited," which makes their elimination or modification difficult, though it was

117 Ibid., p. 44.
118 "I have in front of me a letter, disturbing in its bare truth, from a poor working woman, a wife and mother of four, whom she is trying to raise as best as possible. She does not have the strength to have a fifth nor the means to raise it. With statements from two doctors, she goes to a clinic. The statements read: 'Termination of the pregnancy is recommended due to a heart defect, general exhaustion, and anemia.' She visits the clinic, where doctors observe her for two days and conclude that she is fit to give birth. It is unthinkable that, with such documentation from doctors—or even without it—a woman from a higher social class would be denied medical assistance in terminating her pregnancy. Being aware of the facts, such over-concern from a doctor, above and beyond his duty, comes across as disgusting." Ibid., p. 29.
119 Mbembe, "Necropolitics," p. 14.

not quite so in Poland. In the post-World War I reconstitution of the country Boy-Żeleński saw a chance to establish progressive legal solutions:

> The country is to create its own legal code, one not burdened by the ballast of the past, because the codes of the former partitioning countries do not breed any particular sentiment in our people. We are in the unique position of being able to create laws tailor made for us, for our specific current needs, in harmony with both the views of the citizenry and the good of the country.[120]

Nonetheless, Boy-Żeleński's fantasy of Poland as a symbol of modernity, at the forefront of "Europe in this kind liberalism," was not meant to be. Though a number of sexual awareness centers did appear during the interwar period thanks to the involvement of female members of Warsaw's intelligentsia, the path that Poland followed was unlike the one taken by Soviet Russia, believed by Boy-Żeleński to be completely singular in terms of social life, and also unlike the one he identified in the Estonian model.[121] The enthusiasm for building a new, if not modern Polish state ignored what persisted beneath the surface: the shocking accounts of sexual repression and the drastic analyses of the economic crisis resulting from the Great War. Perhaps the failure to realize the emancipatory vision for the country, in which the matter of solving the abortion problem was a critical factor, was due to the fact that Poland was strongly attached to traditional Christian values. Boy-Żeleński himself

120 Boy-Żeleński, *Piekło kobiet*, pp. 18–19.

121 "One may wonder why, having addressed this matter and having discussed its development in various countries, I do not relate the reforms introduced in Soviet Russia. The reason is simple. The overall picture of social life in today's Russia is based on rules so dissimilar from ours and proceeds under such different circumstances that any example drawn from that reality could breed doubt as to whether that which is considered correct there would be appropriate elsewhere. When in need, I preferred to refer to tiny Estonia over huge Russia." Ibid., p. 75.

acknowledged that a fundamental obstacles in the repeal of the restrictive law were the "lynchpins of religion, tradition, and civic virtues in those who dwell on issues like the homeland, population policy, and Christian ethics."[122]

The sexual reform movement in Poland failed to catch on with a broad cross-section of the populace, attracting only a narrow spectrum of the socially engaged intelligentsia. It had started relatively late, and was considerably more conservative than the reforms in Germany, England, and Scandinavia.

In Poland, from the beginning, sexual reform was subject to a certain linguistic repression, manifesting in the use of euphemisms most likely intended to avoid head-on confrontation with traditional society. The Polish branch of the World League for Sexual Reform was called the League for Customary Reform, while the English-language term *birth control* was translated as "conscious motherhood."[123] The Polish branch of the League did not advocate equal rights to sexual satisfaction for both sexes, nor did it address the issue of homosexuality or the necessity to revise sexual norms. Nor did the Polish branch base its argument in favor of legal divorce on the need to liberate people from the "tyranny of Church and state," which was one of the foremost points at the 1929 congress of the World League for Sexual Reform in London.[124] Moreover, the League for Customary Reform was not established until 1933, a time when Europe was once again preoccupied with international relations and defense policy, once again leaving social issues unresolved. Likewise, in Poland, the new country's political agenda was becoming increasingly centered on military and authoritarian power.

It is therefore no wonder that a radical voice regarding the legal and social resolution of the abortion problem did not finds

122 Ibid., p. 80.
123 Ibid., p. 42.
124 Ibid.

its way into the popular and democratic artform of film, and that the more political German pictures, like Tintner's Cyankali – §218 or Brecht and Dudow's Kuhle Wampe, went unnoticed. The only German film on the subject to make it to Warsaw screens was Berger's Kreuzzug des Weibes—The Wife's Crusade. It was selected to inaugurate, on March 14, 1927, the newly built Casino Cinema, which quickly developed a reputation for having the most ambitious repertoire of all the cinemas in Warsaw.[125] The Wife's Crusade was screened there under the suggestive title *Krzyżowa droga kobiety*—The Woman's Way of the Cross—which might simply have been a translation error (translating *Kreuzweg* instead of *Kreuzzug*) or, seemingly more plausible, an intentional analogy between the fate of a woman and that of Christ.[126] This semantic shift in the title seems particularly significant: while the German title alludes to the need for women to actively take up the struggle for the right of self-determination regarding their lives and bodies, the Polish title presents women as little more than victims of the system.

The theme of a woman as a victim of the male-dominated judicial system also permeated Polish theatre of this period,[127] becoming the primary subject of the one and only Polish drama to openly and systematically address the issues of a pregnant proletarian woman—the 1932 *Sprawiedliwość* (Justice), by Marcelina Grabowska. In other similar plays, like the much better known *Sprawa Moniki* (Monika's Case), by Maria Morozowicz-

125 See Świdziński, *Co było grane?*, p. 190.

126 A similar situation occurred in Holland, where the film was also screened under the title *De Kruisweg van de Vrouw* (The Woman's Way of the Cross).

127 Jagoda Hernik Spalińska expands on the subject in "Rodzaju żeńskiego," *Dialog* no. 3 (1996). See also Jagoda Hernik Spalińska, "Socfeminizm w teatrze polskim," in *Inna scena. Kobiety w historii i współczesności teatru polskiego*, eds. Agata Adamiecka-Sitek and Dorota Buchwald (Warsaw: Instytut Teatralny im. Zbigniewa Raszewskiego, 2006); Diana Poskuta-Włodek, "Wróg mężczyzny w Krakowie. Polska dramaturgia kobieca w teatrze krakowskim okresu międzywojennego," ibid.

Szczepkowska,[128] adapted by Zofia Modrzewska at the Reduta Institute in 1932, or *Miłość panieńska* (A Woman's Love), by Maria Kuncewiczowa,[129] which had its premiere that same year at the Mały Theatre in Warsaw, the pregnancy dilemma played out mainly in the intellectual sphere—among educated and affluent women (and families). Meanwhile, in Maria Pawlikowska-Jasnorzewska's *Mrówki* (Ants), presented at the Słowacki Theatre in Krakow in 1936, the issue of abortion and the right to decide on procreation related to a land-owning family. And even though, in the first of these dramas, it is the servant Antosia who has the abortion, her character is marginalized for the sake of the self-determination of the two main characters: Anna the architect and Monika the doctor. In turn, in Kuncewiczowa's play, where abortion is not only openly discussed but also openly performed in a gynecology clinic, the decision to terminate the pregnancy is the result of a man's wishes, and not the will of the young aspiring pianist Inka.

Justice clearly deviates from typical dramas concentrating on the issues of self-determination, love, and infidelity faced by women in comfortable economic and professional standing. Grabowska's play, which was directed by Mieczysław Szpakiewicz and premiered at the Municipal Theatre in Vilnius in 1934, later produced at the Słowacki Theatre in Krakow in 1937 under the title *Kobieta nr 14* (Woman no. 14), tells the story of a poor and simple woman from the borderlands, serving a five-year prison sentence for infanticide. In the third year of her prison term, the woman, identified by her prisoner number—14—is seduced by the prison warden's son and gets pregnant again. This time she does not want to terminate the pregnancy but is forced by the prison authorities to have an abortion, performed

128 Maria Morozowicz-Szczepkowska, *Sprawa Moniki. Sztuka w trzech aktach* (Warsaw: Księgarnia F. Hoesicka, 1933).
129 Maria Kuncewiczowa, *Miłość panieńska. Sztuka w czterech aktach* (Warsaw: Towarzystwo Wydawnicze Rój, 1932).

by another inmate known as "the midwife." Complications arising from the amateur procedure bring a physician to the penal institution. The woman is nursed back to health and, thanks to the warden's connections, is subsequently released from prison.

In Grabowska's play, abortion is presented mainly as an outcome of violence inflicted on a woman by representatives of the repressive patriarchy (doctors and lawyers) and not as a tool used willfully by the woman in the fight for her own rights. She is portrayed not only as a puppet of the legal and medical system but also as compliant with the Church's position on abortion. She experiences a deep sense of guilt after her first abortion for breaking God's law, and the second pregnancy thus becomes a chance to make amends.

> I have sinned, I killed my own baby. The fact that I had to do it was not accepted by God and not accepted by the people. But people punish once, while God's punishment persists. But maybe, with this child that I will bring into the world in prison and in suffering —(*crying*) maybe with that child, the people and the Lord will forgive me. Because I want to live. Yes, I want to live. I don't want to keep being kicked, exploited, and lied to.[130]

The woman portrayed by Marcelina Grabowska is a far cry from the class-conscious and sexually aware modern proletarian woman whose image was shaped in Weimar Republic cinema, yet without a doubt she is a character who tenaciously defends her nebulous subjectivity. The entire time, she ostensibly functions as a foreign body, one that resists the system's modes of operating and exposes its violence. Yet in terms of form the play itself (much like those of Morozowicz-Szczepkowska and Kuncewiczowa) constitutes something of an anachronism. The issues

130 Marcelina Grabowska, *Sprawiedliwość. Poważna komedia w czterech aktach*, unpublished manuscript in the collection of the Juliusz Słowacki Theatre in Krakow, p. 14.

taken up by Grabowska, if examined in the light of the author's profession as an active court judge, might have led to the creation of a unique subgenre in the stage documentary form—the courtroom drama. However, this did not come to pass. Limited to the convention of psychological realism, Grabowska's play tells the story of a prisoner through a classic dramatic storyline, evoking sympathy in the spectator/reader instead of revealing the author's personal involvement as an "entity that shapes the content of the documentary message."[131]

Grabowska (like her fellow female authors addressing the issue of abortion through drama) also fails to produce an ideologically unambiguous dramatization of factual material, which was surely the aim of documentary theatre of this period in Poland, a genre that had initially germinated in the amateur workers' theatre movement and later made its way into avant-garde institutional theatre. The proletarian theatre of Witold Wandurski[132] and Antonina Sokolicz, the latter of whom headed up the Lutnia and Scena Robotnicza company in Warsaw just after the war,[133] criticized bourgeois theatre as the theatre of "the upper class's dwindling individuality,"[134] a theatre that ushered in a rift between the stage and the audience. Sokolicz, an author, actor, and activist, called for a repertoire with a "clear social tone and a strongly outlined collective element."[135]

131 Czesław Niedzielski, "O teoretycznoliterackich tradycjach prozy dokumentarnej (Podróż—Powieść—Reportaż)," *Prace Wydziału Filologiczno-Filozoficznego Towarzystwa Naukowego w Toruniu* XVII, 1 (1966), p. 171.

132 See chapter 3 herein, "Polish Angels of History" (section on Afterimages of the Revolutionary Body).

133 During the First World War, Sokolicz traveled to Russia and Siberia, giving patriotic lectures in Polish colonies and prison camps. An account of this tour appeared in the weekly *Na posterunku*, a "women's publication on social, economic, pedagogic and ethical issues." See Antonina Sokolicz, "Z dalekiego Wschodu," in *Na posterunku* no. 24 (1918).

134 Antonina Sokolicz, "Stary a nowy teatr," in *Myśl teatralna polskiej awangardy 1919–1939. Antologia*, ed. Stanisław Marczak-Oborski (Warsaw: Wydawnictwa Artystyczne i Filmowe, 1973), p. 302.

135 Ibid., p. 309

In her 1921 pamphlet *O kulturze artystycznej proletariatu* (On proletarian artistic culture),[136] Sokolicz envisioned a reinvigorated stage that would free the audience of aesthetic stimuli in favor of confronting them with real politics, in which the theatre institution is itself embroiled. Meanwhile, in her 1920 *Pięści* (Fists), a "dramatic sketch set against the Great October Revolution," according to the subtitle, she argues that if drama wishes to engage new viewers—that is, the proletariat—in a living dialogue, then it must not present politically transparent imagery onstage or reproduce past events in a seemingly objective manner. It should instead—being true documentary drama—"present a model of historical processes and do so in such a way that the spectators have no trouble understanding the fact that they are dealing with an interpretation of the past, an interpretation coming from an ideological position that is chosen and openly manifested by the author."[137]

The proletarian theatre that emerged after October 1917, and especially its German iteration, *Zeittheater*,[138] became the leading inspiration for Leon Schiller's political engagement in the years 1929–31.[139] This period of Schiller's career brought a series of political, fact-based productions (plays to a great extent referencing experiences from the First World War), like Carl Zuckmayer's 1929 *Rivalen*, an adaptation of Maxwell Anderson and Laurence Stallings's *What Price Glory*, Jaroslav Hašek's *The Good Soldier Švejk* (1930), Friedrich Wolf's *Cyankali* (1930), Arnold Zweig's *The Case of Sergeant Grischa* (1931), and Sergei

136 Antonina Sokolicz, *O kulturze artystycznej proletariatu* (Warsaw: Związek Zawodowy Pracowników Kolejowych R.P., 1921).

137 Mateusz Borowski, "Frakcja i fakty. Dramaturgia i dramatyzacja dyskursu faktograficznego," in *Nowe Historie 02: Wymowa faktów*, eds. Agata Adamiecka-Sitek and Dorota Buchwald (Warsaw: Instytut Teatralny im. Zbigniewa Raszewskiego, 2011), p. 148.

138 Among the leading representatives of this current were the aforementioned Erwin Piscator and Karl Heinz Martin.

139 See Anna Kuligowska-Korzeniewska, "Faktomontaże Leona Schillera," in *Faktomontaże Leona Schillera*, p. 15.

Tretyakov's *Roar China!* (1932). Schiller's preeminent stage documentary form was the "facto-montage" as practiced by Erwin Piscator beginning in the mid-1920s, which was based on a complex process of appropriation. The radicalism of this novel, intermedia genre was, for Schiller, rooted in the fact that

> it rejects anecdotal and dramatic construction, following instead the example of the nonfiction films of Eisenstein, Pudovkin, Turin, and Ruttmann, or in the manner of a cabaret revue, using thematic connections to bind individual facts taken from collective life, explaining them through speeches, statistical data and graphs projected onscreen, or even film projections containing historical or evidentiary footage.[140]

The first Polish facto-montage, *Polityka społeczna R.P.* (Social Policy in the Republic of Poland), was written by Aleksander Wat, directed and produced by Schiller under nearly conspiratorial conditions,[141] and performed in near secrecy in a subterranean room at the General National Exhibition in Poznań in 1929. The play was an indictment of capitalists who were breaking labor laws in independent Poland and covering up accidents in factories, numerous cases of poisoning, and even deaths caused by noxious substances. The play's script

140 Leon Schiller, "Upadek teatru burżuazyjnego," in *Droga przez teatr 1924–1929*, ed. Jerzy Timoszewicz (Warsaw: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1983), p. 95. As early as 1928, as he was working on *Teatr jutra*, Schiller spoke of the inherent ties linking contemporary theatre with new media and other arts, although he found no inspiration in painting and dramatic literature, which he believed to be anachronistic forms: "Contemporary architecture and engineering show the way. Cinema—only Eisenstein. Prose—if it can lead us through the extraordinary chaos of life today. As it is, we leave painting out of the theatre, as is the case with literature that is out of touch with the times. [...] What we favor is photomontage, poster art, neon signs, and American magazine and catalogue covers, so vibrant and colorful." Leon Schiller, "Teatr jutra," in *Myśl teatralna polskiej awangardy*, p. 336.

141 See Tomas Venclova, "'Polityka społeczna R.P.' w kontekście życia i twórczości Aleksandra Wata," in *Faktomontaże Leona Schillera*, p. 77.

relied on a simple dialectical strategy: a confrontation between the announcer (representing the authoritarian perspective), who cites government materials relating to social policy, and members of the working class, who are the objects of said policy. Other forms of media were used to present the factual data, highlighting the incongruity between the state's achievements as proclaimed by the reader and the real needs and working conditions of the labor force. A publication summing up the exhibition as a whole includes the following on the play:

> The play shows all of the issues relating to social policy in Poland between 1918 and 1928, from the birth of the country of Poland, when there were one million unemployed, when there were hundreds of thousands of repatriates, and when the economy lay in ruins. The text uses statistical materials solely from government sources. Film serves as an auxiliary means of dramatic expression, either illustrating the words onstage or supplementing them [...]. The actor discusses the extent of the repatriation while the film simultaneously shows its progress. Elsewhere, to cement various statistical figures, these figures are projected onscreen (from a film reel). Musical accompaniment is used to enliven the film footage.[142]

Polityka społeczna R.P. was canceled following a visit by Aleksandra Piłsudska. It was censored so quickly after its first performance that hardly anyone got to see it.

Polish dramatic literature that took up the contentious issues of abortion and poverty as the main symptoms of social, political, and economic inequity made little intermedia use of film or of the social-documentary literature burgeoning in the 1930s and characterized by an interest in social injustice and society's lifestyle and health issues. Literary journalism of the

142 *Powszechna Wystawa Krajowa w Poznaniu w roku 1929*, curated by Karol Bertoni (Powszechna Wystawa Krajowa, Poznań 1930), vol. 3, p. 635; cited in *Faktomontaże Leona Schillera*, p. 65.

1930s, whose most notable exponents were Wanda Melcer, Irena Krzywicka, and Elżbieta Szemplińska-Sobolewska, inarguably spawned a modern aesthetic that ushered in a convergence of literary and documentary discourse,[143] and, seeking new forms of expression, "was often marked by persuasiveness and even bias."[144]

In Polish social-documentary literature, the enactment of the 1930s economic crisis took place within the collective body subjected to the repressive force not only of an archaic legal system but also of modern manifestations of capitalism. This is demonstrated by Małgorzata Büthner-Zawadzka in her analysis of two journalistic series by a long-time activist of the League for Customary Reform, Wanda Melcer: *Kochanek zamordowanych dziewcząt* (Murdered Girls' Lover; 1934) and *Czarny ląd* (Black Land; 1936):[145]

> At the core of the author's interest is the body: bodies of prostitutes seeing clients and subjected to mandatory medical exams, bodies of people suffering from venereal-diseases, passive bodies of the denizens of homeless shelters, the body of an infant during the ritual of circumcision, bodies of Jewish women bathing in a mikvah, as well as a deceased body being cleaned and the bodies of dead animals. [... Melcer] observes the city as if it is a stage set in which a battle is being waged: what is material and corporal is disciplined by what is abstract, that is, by legal and religious law.[146]

143 See Elżbieta Rybicka, *Modernizowanie miasta. Zarys problematyki urbanistycznej w nowoczesnej literaturze polskiej* (Krakow: Universitas, 2003), pp. 262.
144 Ibid., p. 264.
145 These stories, first printed in the very influential literary journal *Wiadomości Literackie*, appeared in Warsaw between 1924 and 1939.
146 Małgorzata Büthner-Zawadzka, *Warszawa w oczach pisarek. Obraz i doświadczenie miasta w polskiej prozie kobiecej 1864–1939* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo IBL PAN, 2014), p. 497.

The city-as-theatre metaphor aptly conveys the specifics of the dramaturgy of social documentary literature, in which the engaged subject often utilizes a "stage" as a key strategy in enacting reality. Constructed in the mold of a documentary stage, Mecler's descriptions of the venereal disease hospital and the neighborhoods rife with poverty, idleness, homelessness, and prostitution manage to achieve a dynamic energy akin to a modern motion picture, which allows her to evoke the sense of alienation felt by a human in world of inanimate objects. In a description of a prostitute roundup in *Murdered Girls' Lover*, we read:

> Some walk on their own, in a great hurry; others, prodded, trip on the curb and curse. Others still must be detained by force. They are crammed in like inanimate objects, like puppets stuffed into a box, from which a stiff arm, a stretched-out leg, or the tip of a hat protrude.[147]

This unnerving picture of the extreme objectification of women becomes the scene of a necroperformance: it brings back the experiences of many women during the Great War, when violence was used to force them into having sex with soldiers. The commitment to fight prostitution as an extreme form of patriarchal repression dates back to an assembly of the Women's League of War Alert that took place in September 1917 in Warsaw. It brought together members of the Union for the Equal Rights of Polish Women, the Polish Women's League, the United Landed Women's Association, and the Association of Catholic Servants of God. It was at the time that Polish women, coming together across ideological lines, took a stand

147 Wanda Melcer, "Miasto w mroku," in *Kochanek zamordowanych dziewcząt* (Warsaw: Towarzystwo Wydawnicze "Rój," 1934), p. 22.

against prostitution, asserting that it was primarily rooted in gender inequality.[148]

The literary journalism of Irena Krzywicka also revealed the theatricality of social and political life, especially her anthology *Sąd idzie* (Here Comes the Court),[149] with its "vision of the courtroom as a stage, with the legal officials, witnesses, and the accused as the cast of characters."[150] Krzywicka's aesthetic approach to the role of reporter is assessed rather critically by Małgorzata Szpakowska as she points to Krzywicka's inability to reconcile herself to the fact that a court trial is "a face-off between prosecution and defense, proceeding in accordance with precise rules, and not a display of empathy or a psychoanalytic session."[151]

In her assessment of Krzywicka's aesthetization of a scene from real life, Agata Zawiszewska in turn identifies the type of reader targeted by Krzywicka's reports, a reader who (much like the reporter) "is easily identified as to their class":

> The reporter's tone, which—taking the form not of an anecdote but an injunction—speaks to members of the higher classes, above all the intelligentsia, about the existence of the lower classes, is constantly palpable. There is no hypocrisy in this: Krzywicka is a reformist, not a revolutionary; she is the product of and spokesperson for enlightenment, and thus believes in the sense of unhurried emancipation.[152]

148 Joanna Dufrat, "W trosce o zdrowie moralne społeczeństwa – organizacje kobiece wobec prostytucji w dwudziestoleciu międzywojennym," in *Kobieta i rewolucja obyczajowa*, p. 297.
149 The stories were originally printed in *Wiadomości Literackie* (1932–34) and later published in a 1935 anthology.
150 Büthner-Zawadzka, *Warszawa w oczach pisarek*, pp. 501–02.
151 Małgorzata Szpakowska, *"Wiadomości Literackie" prawie dla wszystkich* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo W.A.B, 2012), p. 168.
152 Agata Zawiszewska, *Życie świadome. O nowoczesnej prozie intelektualnej Ireny Krzywickiej* (Szczecin: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Szczecińskiego, 2010), p. 216.

Elżbieta Szemplińska-Sobolewska writes from a similar "reformist" perspective in one of the most intriguing journalistic stories describing a Warsaw slum, "Annopol, rezerwat nędzy" (Annopol, a Reservation of Squalor), published in 1938 in *Wiadomości Literackie*. The article was a response to a specific "product of the municipal Department of Social Services," "an 11,000-inhabitant 'city' with no doctor, no pharmacy, no midwife, no bathhouse, no public laundry, faulty toilets, insufficient water supply, and overcrowded living quarters shared by two or three families, each with several family members."[153] In the years 1925–33, the municipal government built the Annopol colony on the bank of the Vistula, where, with the intention of eliminating the growing problem of extreme poverty from the field of visions of Varsovians, they relocated—as if to a camp—the city's most hopeless of the unemployed and homeless. About this "Warsaw reservation of squalor, teeming with bedbugs, lice, cockroaches and children," Szemplińska-Sobolewska writes:

> Annopol is not visible from the city center; Annopol is far away. Its wooden, stone, and concrete "shelters" offend no-one's eyes. No delicate ears are outraged by the juveniles' abhorrent cursing, the coughing of children, or the yelping of mothers. Nor by the cackles mixing with the curses, coughing, and yelping. The squalor is quarantined like the plague; extradited into a bona fide field. Assigned to the sands. Disarmed of its teeth and claws. It is a squalor to observe, for show; clinical, controlled by the system, unthreatening like animals at a reservation, poisoning only itself with its venom.[154]

153 This is how Justyna Budzińska-Tylicka, a physician and social activist, described Annopol in 1938. Justyna Budzińska-Tylicka, "Jeszcze raz – Annopol. Stołeczne siedlisko nędzy i bezrobocia," in *Niepiękne dzielnice. Reportaże o międzywojennej Warszawie*, eds. Jan Dąbrowski and Józef Koskowski (Warsaw: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1964), p. 144.

154 Elżbieta Szemplińska-Sobolewska, "Annopol, rezerwat nędzy," in *Niepiękne dzielnice*, pp. 130, 131.

And though, as Büthner-Zawadzka reminds us, Witold Gombrowicz attempted to defend Szemplińska-Sobolewska's writing, calling her work proletarian "not because of this or that ideology but because of [her] deep instinctive animosity towards the higher world,"[155] and rightly pointing to a certain level of connection between the person doing the writing with the reality being described, it is still hard to escape the impression that even here the author maintains the position of a member of the intellectual class, a position that accounts for the prevalence of an enlightened and not revolutionary approach to the fight for social reform in the 1930s.

A peculiar example of overcoming this intellectual approach to the emancipatory project may be found in the work of the Polish-German author Eleonora Kalkowska, whose contribution to Polish theatre has only been acknowledged in recent years.[156] Her German-language dramas from 1928–33, especially *Sprawa Jakubowskiego* (The Case of Jakubowski; 1929) and *Doniesienia drobne* (Minor Dispatches; 1932), seem to dovetail quite nicely with the formal theatrical experiments of Erwin Piscator, Bertolt Brecht, and Leon Schiller, as well as with the strategies utilized in the semi-documentary film forms from the Weimar Republic. Both of the plays constitute a type of social documentary dramaturgy that is unprecedented in Poland, one that, being deeply rooted in the public discourse, attempts to enact the socioeconomic crisis of the late 1920s/early 1930s as a consequence of militarism and capitalism.

155 Witold Gombrowicz, "Nowe postacie w literaturze. Elżbieta Szemplińska," in *Czytelnicy i krytycy. Proza, reportaże, krytyka literacka, eseje, przedmowy*, Varia 1, vol. 1 (Krakow: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2004), p. 145.

156 The first to recall this writer, who had been completely forgotten in Polish theatre and literary studies, was Zbigniew Herbert in his profile "Eleonora Kalkowska," published in *Twórczość*, 7 (1972). Her two dramas, *Sprawa Jakubowskiego* and *Doniesienia drobne*, were later published by the Zbigniew Raszewski Theatre Institute in 2005. See Eleonora Kalkowska, *Sprawa Jakubowskiego. Doniesienia drobne. Dramaty* (Warsaw: Instytut Teatralny im. Zbigniewa Raszewskiego, 2005).

The Case of Jakubowski tells the true story of Józef Jakubowski, a Polish agricultural laborer and a former Russian prisoner during the First World War, who, in order to escape the bleak employment prospects in Poland, decides to settle in an East Prussian village and start a family with a German woman, despite the general prejudice against Poles in the area. The woman has a son, Ewald, from an earlier, presumably incestuous relationship, whom Jakubowski decides to raise even after the woman dies giving birth to his daughter. The three-year-old Ewald is murdered by the spiteful locals, but it is Jakubowski, "the savage—the Pole,"[157] who is accused of the crime and sentenced to death in accordance with Paragraph 211 of the German criminal code, concerning murder under specific aggravating circumstances.

Kalkowska's "contemporary tragedy in 22 scenes" is something of a stage reiteration of the story of Józef Jakubowski, whose case—after his execution in 1928—became talked about to the point that members of the League for Human Rights—among them Heinrich Mann, Albert Einstein, and Stefan Zweig—successfully demanded a posthumous retrial.[158] Kalkowska's play deftly utilizes documentation while skillfully evoking emotion in the reader/spectator: it provokes a sense of social injustice and empathy with the innocent protagonist, who is defenseless against the vindictiveness of the law. Kalkowska also manages to portray the peasantry as a society rife with alcoholism, a society which, due to the lack of adequate living conditions and proper education, is reduced to national stereotypes—characteristics that ultimately bring about the downfall of the Polish farmer and that are largely the result of the hatred spread by the First World War.

157 Eleonora Kalkowska, *Sprawa Jakubowskiego*, trans. Józef Brodzki, in ibid., p. 31.

158 See Jagoda Hernik Spalińska, "Eleonora Kalkowska – przywracanie pamięci," in Eleonora Kalkowska, *Sprawa Jakubowskiego. Doniesienia drobne. Dramaty*, p. 8.

> "These are remnants of the memories," says the Judge during the trial, "the keepsakes left to us by those barbarians at the start of the war … These half-savage people on our land! Our eastern border should have been guarded as strongly as the Rhine … Our eastern borderlands are exposed to an excess of this antagonistic, foreign element … It must be weeded out or squashed… This Russian invasion on German soil … it is an irreparable mistake."[159]

Kalkowska's "poetic reporting," as the author herself characterized her work,[160] was soon picked up by German politically engaged theatres. The issue of ethnic bigotry towards Poles was well-known in Prussia, where, as Ernst Toller writes in his autobiography

> Germans and Poles fought tooth and nail over every scrap of land. A German who sold land to a Pole was denounced as a traitor. Children, meaning us, called the Poles "polaks" and we believed them to be the scions of Cain, who had killed Abel and was cursed by God.[161]

It is therefore no surprise that *The Case of Jakubowski* had its premiere on Piscator's stage in Berlin in April 1929, directed by Alfred Trostler. Piscator, whose status was already gravely threatened by regular intervention from the state prosecutor, decided to stage this "slap in the face of German nationalism,"[162] but he censored the ending. Instead of showing Jakubowski's execution backed by a guard's cries of "You've killed an innocent man! Murderers!"[163] he had the director cut the scene early, as the condemned man walks his final walk accompanied by

159 Kalkowska, *Sprawa Jakubowskiego*, p. 66.
160 See the playbill for *Sprawa Jakubowskiego* at Teatr Ateneum, dir. Janusz Strachocki, in the collection of Instytut Sztuki PAN.
161 Ernst Toller, *Eine Jugend in Deutschland* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2011), p. 12.
162 Antoni Słonimski, "Inauguracja Ateneum," in *Wiadomości Literackie* no. 38 (1929), p. 4.
163 Kalkowska, *Sprawa Jakubowskiego*, p. 81.

a priest.[164] This modification incensed the author, who was in attendance and stormed the stage in protest.

The Polish premiere of *The Case of Jakubowski* took place as the retrial was still underway in the Weimar Republic, just as Poland was in the grips of the economic crisis, with growing unemployment and mounting anti-German sentiments. In September 1929, Kalkowska's play, directed by and starring Janusz Strachocki, was chosen to open the new Anateum workers' theatre, under the direction of Maria Strońska, herself an actor. Strońska's short tenure as the theatre's director is noteworthy not only because her involvement would be overshadowed by her successor, the legendary Stefan Jaracz, but also because Strońska's politically engaged repertoire was comparable to the approach of Erwin Piscator.[165] Strońska staged dramas about people whose pain was a consequence of their experience of World War I, focusing more on the message than production—perhaps not surprising that she emphasized content over artistic vision, given that her theatrical activity coincided with the Great Depression.

Kalkowska's incisive views on the realities of life in the late 1920s and early 1930s are reflected in her drama *Minor Dispatches*, based on press clippings on the alarming rate of suicide among the jobless at that time. Yet in this play it is not people but an inanimate object that becomes the agent changing the course of events and responsible for exacerbating human isolation. The object in question here is a newspaper. Crippled by the fear of losing their jobs, the play's characters read reports of skyrocketing unemployment and fall prey to words that have lost their original context. From the stage directions:

164 See ibid., pp. 77–79.

165 Jagoda Hernik Spalińska writes on this in more detail in *Eleonora Kalkowska – przywracanie pamięci*.

> Appearing on the backdrop are the headlines of five news reports: "Victims of Unemployment," "A Pianist's Tragedy," "Deliberate Action or an Unfortunate Accident?" "A Lovers' Tragedy," "Shocking Disturbance at Employment Office." The text below the headlines is illegible, the letters swaying and flickering. […] The backdrop goes dark and only a small part of the right corner remains illuminated. The screen above that corner tears and falls apart. We see part of a street, the ground floor of a building, with a jostling crowd out front.[166]

Thus a necroperformance of real-life documents tracking the events of social life—actual suicides—leads up to a series of suicides committed by the jobless characters in Kalkowska's play. The suicides are first shown as real newspaper reports printed on the backdrop and only in later materialize in scenes and images onstage. In this way the storyline is reversed: everything has already happened, so the outcome for the characters is clear and inevitable. They just need to enact the poverty, the hunger, the children rummaging in dumpsters, people losing their jobs and taking their lives. In her open portrayal of the actual suicides, Kalkowska does not shy away from a most shocking approach, seen, for example, when one of the characters, the pianist, loses the tool of his trade as a result of debt. Again, from the stage directions:

> Lutz turns to his piano, wraps his arms around it, rests his head on it, then he looks around the room uneasily, walks over to a wall and removes the large painting hanging on it. He detaches the cord and checks its strength. All of this he does very sluggishly and in a vacant manner. He ties one end of the cord to a doorknob, tosses it over his shoulder and heads for the window. Suddenly, he freezes, as if hit by lightning. At that moment, a streetlight comes on and illuminates his

166 Eleonora Kalkowska, "Doniesienia drobne. Fragment współczesności," trans. Barbara Bernhardt, in Kalkowska, *Sprawa Jakubowskiego. Doniesienia drobne. Dramaty*, p. 89.

> head … A look of pained happiness comes over his face … He rises up on the tips of his toes and lets out a melodious sound, which he sustains for some time … Then, exuberantly, he tosses some books onto the floor, steps up on the pile and produces another sound, this one at a higher pitch … When the tone dies down, he climbs up on a chair and lets out an even shriller tone, waits for it to subside, climbs up on the table, a fourth tone, returns to the chair, a fifth, to the table, a sixth, and finally goes to the window frame, a seventh tone. Altogether his sounds form a specific motif, the one he was searching for at the beginning of the Scene. As Lutz, being the embodiment of this motif, climbs and descends from the various items, the room goes pitch black. Only his head is illuminated brightly by the light from outside, which makes his head resemble a whole note bobbing up and down on a five-line staff. At the highest tone, he slides his head into the noose—and drops.[167]

The tonal motif produced by the pianist later returns in the third interlude as the melody sung by a group of young men ("of the 'working students' type"). The lyrics extrapolate an individual's fate to the fate of a whole community in decay:

> STUDENTS: We push on in the streets
> We push on in this city
> Amidst this jungle of empty homes
> Shelter there is none
>
> With a song and empty bellies
> We wander in this city
> Where the bank tills are full
> But for us there is nothing
>
> There is nothing in our stomachs
> The hunger is almighty …

167 Ibid., p. 114.

GUARD: Enough! Bite your tongues!
STUDENTS: We only want to eat!

National community—
That's what they proudly call it
Communal baseness there is plenty
But community there is none…[168]

In the formal sense, *Minor Dispatches* is surely an interesting example of a modern approach to montage—the author not only assembles the drama out of images (as she did with *The Case of Jakubowski*) but also makes it possible to rearrange or altogether skip particular scenes: "For example, Picture Four may be shown in the place of Picture Two, and vice versa."[169] By showing the suicides as reenactments of events that are known and understood, the author shows the spectators that the next one to be forced to commit suicide may be any one of them. Death here is no individual event but a copy of earlier events and a template for future ones. For this reason, all of the play's dead rise and face the audience once more: "Their heads are brightly illuminated while their bodies are submerged in darkness. The suicide choir advances"[170] and recites a song of the dead as the one and only remaining pillar of community:

MEN: Give up your seats!

WOMEN: Here we come!

EVERYONE: Places for us—it's us!
Always here! Always here! Always here!

168 Ibid., pp. 114–15.
169 Kalkowska, "Doniesienia drobne. Fragment współczesności," p. 84.
170 Ibid., p. 142.

INGE: Though the eye can't see us …

MRS HELBIG: Ears can't detect …

EVERYONE: Our face indestructible like an eternal spirit.

WOMEN: And when a thick fog sticks your eyes shut,
Beneath your closed eyelids we'll slither into the murk.

MEN: Even as we rot and as we decompose,
We still remain …[171]

After the 1932 Berlin premiere of *Minor Dispatches* at the Schiller Theater, Eleonora Kalkowska's uncompromising perspective did not go unnoticed by Heinrich Mann, who wrote that "each scene in the play is a shout […]; and altogether they form a truth, an ultimate truth, a cry of emotion."[172] Identifying in each subsequent "forced" departure of an ordinary citizen—a doorman, the pianist, a teacher, and other jobless individuals—as a manifestation of human alienation and the deterioration of community brought on by the socioeconomic crisis, which only breeds more of the same, Mann issued an appeal to his contemporaries: "First, one must be aware of the dead; otherwise one will not recognize the living."[173]

171 Ibid., pp. 142–43.
172 Heinrich Mann, "Die Macht des Gefühls," *Berliner Tageblatt*, December 12, 1932.
173 Ibid.

The Return of Odysseus the Soldier

The Anthropomorphic Remnant

In 1904, when there were still no signs of the impending global war that was to demolish Europe's geopolitical order and essential truths regarding humanity and civilization, the Krakow playwright, poet, and painter Stanisław Wyspiański started to create an image of a post-apocalypse world. He wrote *Powrót Odysa* (The Return of Odysseus) in a frenzy just after completing *Hamlet*, over the last four days and nights of the receding year (published in April 1907, a few months before Wyspiański's death).[1] In *The Return of Odysseus* the theatre philosopher prophetically captured the experience of the modern war soldier as paradigmatic of the 20th-century subject, and simultaneously of the artist. The final form of the drama may have been influenced by echoes of the events rattling the Kingdom of Poland in 1905, and mainly the rhythm of the impending revolution as it progressed from initial enthusiasm through bloody conflict to the ultimate bitterness of defeat and postrevolutionary repression, all of which forced many European modernist artists to reconsider their views on the place of art in politics and society. Wyspiański voiced his support for the revolution—as recalls novelist and playwright Stefan Żeromski, having been dispatched to the playwright by legionnaire commander Józef Piłsudski—by signing an appeal "calling for the whole nation to make donations for arms" for the army being assembled and by donating eleven of his paintings and a drawing of the Częstochowa Madonna, on the basis of which Wyspiański

1 Wyspiański died on November 28, 1907.

made a lithograph for the revolutionary faction and "one hundred thousand prints [...] at his own cost."[2]

It is significant to note, however, that Wyspiański's *The Return of Odysseus* wasn't staged until November 24, 1917, during the Great War, at the Juliusz Słowacki Teatr in Krakow. The premiere took place the very year that the Polish poet and Austrian soldier Józef Wittlin began work on a translation into Polish of *The Odyssey* while interned in an Italian POW camp. The first version of his translation,[3] which preserved the spirit of the era and remained (as Wittlin himself admitted) strongly influenced by the language of Stanisław Wyspiański,[4] appeared on bookstore shelves in 1924. The premiere of *The Return of Odysseus*, directed by and starring Józef Sosnowski,[5] ushered in a drastically different political perspective on the status of refugees than the one that dominated the prevailing romantic myth, in which the wanderer/pilgrim was associated with the Pole. Of his many theatre-tested plays, which thrust Wyspiański, even in his lifetime, into the role of national prophet, it was *The Return of Odysseus*, the drama about the murderous soldier-exile, that was selected to commemorate the tenth anniversary of the author's death.[6] Moreover, the decision to stage this radically

2 Stefan Żeromski, "Na broń," in Stefan Żeromski, *Elegie i inne pisma literackie i społeczne* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Jakuba Mortkowicza, 1928), pp. 91, 94.

3 Józef Wittlin continually revised his translation of the *Odyssey* over many years. There were three print versions, published in 1924, 1931, and 1957.

4 See Józef Korpanty, "Zapomniany tłumacz 'Odysei' Homerowej," in *Przekładaniec* no. 18–19 (2007), p. 193, www.ejournals.eu/Przekladaniec/2007/Numer-18–19/art/3099/, accessed January 12, 2015. See also Homer, *The Odyssey*, trans. A.T. Murray (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1919).

5 In 1916 Józef Sosnowski appeared in the role of the Primate in the Warsaw premiere of Stanisław Wyspiański's *Liberation* at the Polish Theatre.

6 In Warsaw, Wyspiański's death was commemorated in the manner typical of poets associated with the independence movement, with fragments of *Legion* and *Lelewel* performed at the Polish Theatre on November 28, 1917, starring the legendary Ludwik Solski in the roles of Mickiewicz and Lelewel. Solski also directed the performances. See Jerzy Got, "Zwycięski pochód," in *Wyspiański i teatr 1907–1957*, ed. Alfred Woycicki (Krakow: Teatr im. Słowackiego, 1957), p. 98.

pessimistic play was made in Krakow, where on August 3, 1914, at Józef Piłsudski's behest, the First Cadre Company of the Polish Legions was founded in a haze of euphoria and where, on November 5, 1916, the decree of the Austro-Hungarian and German emperors announcing the establishment of the state of Poland was welcomed in good faith. Signs of the mass veneration of Józef Piłsudski also became evident in the Słowacki Theatre, which for one week in November 1916 ran ceremonial performances of two 19th-century plays especially for the legions' commander: Aleksander Fredro's *Śluby Panieńskie* (Maidens' Vows; November 8) and Władysław Anczyc's *Kościuszko pod Racławicami* (Kościuszko at the Battle of Racławice; November 12). The patriotic celebrations in the theatre, which drew a mass of uniformed spectators, were interrupted by standing recitations of "God Save Poland" and heartfelt renditions of the Polish national anthem, as well as tears, applause, and shouts of "Long live Piłsudski!"[7]—making the commander the de facto protagonist of both plays. Less than two years later, the same stage played host to an ancient epic hero portrayed not as a metaphor for a Polish soldier but as a reflection of the human condition in the face of the seemingly interminable and psychophysically exhausting Great War.

In the book *Nacht über Europa. Kulturgeschichte des Ersten Weltkrieges* (Night over Europe: A Cultural History of the First World War) the German historian Ernst Piper convincingly points to the drastic caesura that followed the bloody year of 1916, which brought the highest number of dead, wounded, and captured. From this perspective, the year 1917 was a period in which soldiers found themselves on the brink of physical and psychological exhaustion. The immense rise in the number of

7 Diana Poskuta-Włodek writes on this in detail in *Trzy dekady z dziejów sceny. Teatr im. Juliusza Słowackiego w Krakowie 1914–1945* (Krakow: Teatr im. Juliusza Słowackiego, 2001), pp. 89–90.

disabled soldiers drove the period's extraordinary advances in medicine,[8] especially in the area of anesthetics and antiseptics, and above all in orthopedic, brain, and reconstructive surgery. Also in 1917, under pressure from veterinarians, there was significant improvement in the situation of animals employed in the war, with "the system [being] reorganized to reflect the system of medical care for humans."[9] At the same time it was a period that brought the fewest deaths, despite the greatest degree of hunger, dispair, and resignation. "The year 1917 was not a time of generals but a time of doctors. That was when war trauma was recognized as a form of psychological suffering."[10] In the figure of Odysseus—not so much returning to the Krakow stage as eerily haunting it—we can identify the physically and psychologically deteriorating Great War soldier.

It is certainly worthwhile to observe the change transpiring on the Słowacki Theatre stage from the perspective of the deep social crisis diagnosed by Piper. The international experience of the war as the widespread failure of civilization was reflected in the representation of that reality in Polish theatre. For the 1916 performance of Wyspiański's *Acropolis*, the show's director, Adam Grzymała-Siedlecki, cut the third act of the play in order to "emphasize the accents of optimism that are significant to

8 During the war there was already an awareness that the state of medicine was incomparable to that in any previous war. An interesting example of the education of soldiers and civilians on medical advancements is a booklet published by Dr. Konrad Biesalski, a physician and director of the Oscar-Helene-Heim in Berlin: *Die Fürsorge für unsere heimkehrenden Krieger, insbesondere die Kriegskrüppelfürsorge* (Leipzig: Verlag von Leopold Voss, 1915). The book offers information on medical as well as social assistance available to war invalids.

9 Éric Baratay, *Le Point de vue animal. Une autre version de l'histoire* (Paris: Seuil, 2012), p. 270. Baratay covers the specific effects of the reorganization of the veterinary system: "Commandeered horses were separated from the ill ones, which were first quarantined in special stables, where they were placed into sections for ill, suspected ill, and free of communicable illness. There they were subdivided according to the type of condition (internal, skin, postoperative) in order to be treated by more specialized personnel." Ibid. p. 271–72.

10 Ernst Piper, *Nacht über Europa. Kulturgeschichte des Ersten Weltkriegs* (Berlin: Propyläen Verlag, 2013), p. 399.

the fervent hope of imminent independence."[11] Whereas in 1916 Grzymała-Siedlecki was trying to remain hopeful, by 1917, only one year later, he opted to show the despair of all the displaced soldiers and supported the production of *The Return of Odysseus*, that "poetic yet extraordinarily relevant commentary on the fate of the thousands of modern 'Odysseuses' scattered across all of the European front lines."[12] Likewise, there were significant changes in 1917 in the theatre company's cast, and in the social makeup of the Krakow public in general. On the one hand 1917 saw a wave of actors returning to the Słowacki Theatre from theatres in Vienna and Warsaw as well as from the battlefield, including those who had just been discharged from the army.[13] On the other, the theatre was now attracting a new class of spectators, often not originally from the Galicia region that included Krakow. This ethnic Pole-administrated crownland of the Habsburg Monarchy developed significant cultural autonomy, and all newcomers were considered "foreign," especially those who came from Russian Poland and got rich in war-related businesses, mainly in the food trade, and now sought to rapidly ascend the social ladder through participation in culture.[14] Diana Poskuta-Włodek accurately described Grzymała-Siedlecki's tenure—a time when the theatre, perceived as a social microcosm, underwent unprecedented reconfiguration—as the "theatre for Odysseuses," underscoring the connection between modern identity and the experience of the war, which despite expectations refused to come to an end.

It seems that the figure of Odysseus materializing on the Krakow stage near the end of 1917 as a Great War soldier condemned to exile essentially suppressed, or at least marginalized, the "wandering" associated with Poland's national

11 Poskuta-Włodek, *Trzy dekady z dziejów sceny*, p. 91.
12 Ibid., p. 93.
13 Like, for instance, Włodzimierz Kosiński.
14 See Poskuta-Włodek, *Trzy dekady z dziejów sceny*, p. 84.

independence. Though on the surface Józef Sosnowski's production was set in antiquity,[15] the stage actually referenced the ruins familiar to the audience—the ruins of a war that transformed Europe into a laboratory of killing techniques, and Poles into fratricides and victims of fratricidal battles. Particularly telling was the third act, whose "seaside desert" was designed by Zbigniew Pronaszko as a rocky coast strewn with human bones and skulls. This setting, inhabited by an unkempt beggar in rags and juxtaposed with the deadness of an unmoving sea,[16] and with the ostentatious theatricality of the Mermaid character, was captured by the photographer Wacław Szymborski, thanks to whom we may today witness that constellation of theatre, body, bone, and war.

It is without a doubt a very specific constellation. This Ithaca littered with parched human bones is a stage echo of the vision of the prophet Ezekiel in the Old Testament, depicting the valley of dry bones as a battlefield after a great slaughter. Closing the play, this image might have been an attempt to build a parallel between the slavery and exile of the Israelites and the situation of the Polish nation, while also a means of rousing hope for a swift resurgence. Thanks to the prophet, the seemingly dead nation is given new life: first, the bones come together, then ligaments start to form, flesh grows and skin envelops it all. Finally, upon the prophet's word, God enters the lifeless human bodies, who then come to life and form a huge army.[17] In this picture of a battlefield pile of bones com-

15 The stage sets (with the exception of the rocky shore) were made by Zygmunt Wierciak, and the costumes by Zbigniew Pronaszko.

16 The fact that the sea was motionless was criticized by Władysław Prokesch, among others. See W. Pr., "Powrót Odysa," *Nowa Reforma,* November 26, no. 546, morning edition (2017).

17 In Ezekiel (37:1–10; King James Version), we read: "1 The hand of the Lord was upon me, and carried me out in the spirit of the Lord, and set me down in the midst of the valley which was full of bones, / 2 And caused me to pass by them round about: and, behold, there were very many in the open valley; and, lo, they were very dry. / 3 And he said unto me, Son of man, can these bones live? And I

ing together we also detect the presence of a specifically Polish social imaginary based on a literary archive of remains and ancestors. And though the *ossa*—bones of dead people—motif can be traced back to Old Polish literature,[18] it was only in the 19th century that this old topos was linked with the experience of Polish modernity, acquired while in a state of servitude to foreign empires: beginning with Mickiewicz's *Pan Tadeusz* (1932), in which, from San Domingo, the veteran of the Polish Legions brings "old bones to that fatherland which he could no longer defend"; through Wyspiański's *Legion* (1900), in which the wandering minstrel Rapsod's songs glorify the corpses of Polish soldiers and proclaim their eternal life: "shreds, shreds; / the buzzards have gorged themselves / and this blood and these clothes / in mud and filth the heart now lies / the grave fresh and the corpse fresh, — / the spirit lost."[19] Wyspiański's

answered, O Lord God, thou knowest. / 4 Again he said unto me, Prophesy upon these bones, and say unto them, O ye dry bones, hear the word of the Lord. […] / 7 So I prophesied as I was commanded: and as I prophesied, there was a noise, and behold a shaking, and the bones came together, bone to his bone. / 8 And when I beheld, lo, the sinews and the flesh came up upon them, and the skin covered them above: but there was no breath in them. […] / 10 So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood up upon their feet, an exceeding great army."

18 In the *Old Polish Dictionary*, we read, for example: "Bog rosypa cosczi gich (ossa eorum)," "Gednegonasczye dnya vstaną s martvych kosczy vmarlych (ossa mortuorum)" (*Słownik staropolski*, vol. 3, b. 5 (18) (Wrocław – Warsaw – Krakow: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich Wydawnictwo Polskiej Akademii Nauk, 1962), p. 363). A dictionary of 16th-century Polish, meanwhile, offers collocations such as "to pray to bones," "to mourn bones," "to transfer bones," "to venerate bones," "to return bones to the earth" (*Słownik polszczyzny XVI wieku*, vol. 11 (Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, Wrocław, 1978), pp. 71–73). In *Pamiętniki Paska* (under the Year of the Lord 1676), we encounter an entry reading "Brought to Krakow was the king's body, Michał's; also brought was Kazimierz from France, who did not wish to finish his life with us and rejoined us after his death. […] you freely disdained the fatherland who raised you with love and faith always, but your bones yearned to return to it and decay there!" (Jan Chryzostom Pasek, *Pamiętniki*, ed. Władysław Czapliński (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1979), p. 501).

19 Stanisław Wyspiański, "Legion," in Stanisław Wyspiański, *Lelewel. Legion, Dzieła zebrane*, vol. 3, ed. Leon Płoszewski et al. (Krakow: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1958), p. 183.

drama in particular, which can be read as a historiosophical discourse with the ideology of Polish national uprisings, could have been of fundamental significance to the director of *The Return of Odysseus*, since he decided to wipe away all references to Polish history and to universalize the depiction of the human remnants. In Sosnowski's production—though the chance for an independent Poland was becoming ever more real in 1917—the bones never come to life. The "human remains" stay on the stage to the very end as inanimate objects, and as nothing more than the by-product of warfare, of violence in a world from which the *sacrum* has disappeared.

Photos of the Krakow production of *The Return of Odysseus* appeared in newspapers of the day alongside photographs showing little of the legion brigades and much of the cinders of Europe. In issue number 50 of the weekly newspaper *Nowości Ilustrowane* from 1917, appearing next to photos and a review of *The Return of Odysseus* are accounts from the front lines with a series of photographs depicting, in order: the ruins of the Italian town of Conegliano after being taken by the Allies, the steeple of the Ponte di Pave church damaged by artillery blasts, the ruins of the church in Ghelnvelt destroyed by the English, a bridge on the Tagliamento river destroyed by the Italians, and the wreckage of a downed plane. It was no coincidence that the photo showing Odysseus drawing his bow appears on the same page as a photo of a soldier with a bomb. In this visual arrangement, in which the ruins of Europe are depicted as the aftermath of man's actions, Szymborski's photo of a rocky shore with human bones takes on a contemporary reference. At the same time it reveals a link between anthropology and theatre, one that makes it possible to universalize the experience of death in order to examine mourning rites disconnected from Polish historical/cultural reflection; a link that upends the erstwhile romantic notions of death and its associated rituals involving the invocation of the spirits of the dead. This constellation—so material and so demonstrative of the sordidness of

death—reveals a subjectivity founded on bones, corpses, and real violence, and not on the spirits of ancestors.

Admittedly, the sources of subjectivity construed on the basis of real violence constituted the fundamental experience of Poles throughout the 19th century, though in the Polish narrative of death—heroic but at the same time rooted in sacrifice and relating to a vertical order—the image of bloody Polish uprisings and the cruelty inflicted on others was effectively repressed. In his *Liberation*, Stanisław Wyspiański was already struggling with the phenomenon of Polishness, exorcising the spirits and apparitions of the past and thereby rendering impossible the experience of presence beyond metaphysics. The final visual strategy, which forced the spectators to identify themselves in the display of conventional Polish behaviors onstage, may well have been informed by Wyspiański's designs for the stained-glass windows in Wawel Cathedral. One sketch in particular, from 1900, shows the eyeless corpse of King Casimir III the Great looming over the viewer.

Eligiusz Niewiadomski's observes the active role of remains in culture:

> From shoulders glistening with the whiteness of bone flow the tatters of a patterned coat, a head rising up above, above a scrumptious head, unforgettable, a skull furnished with a crown, looking out with its dead eyes, at once so ferociously and so agonizingly. [...] Teeth nestled in a brittle jaw shine through the tufts of facial hair. The specter seems to want to say something, but the words are trapped in his chest.[20]

Yet, only in *The Return of Odysseus* was the poet able to capture the realness and universality of death and its connection with the formation of subjectivity. We can thus say that Wyspiański put forth a spectacle of death, rooted in nothing

20 Cited in Stanisław Rosiek, *Zwłoki Mickiewicza. Próba nekrografii poety* (Gdańsk: słowo/obraz terytoria, 1997), pp. 82, 83.

more than fragments, remains, and leftovers, as a mirror reflection of and modern substitute for the Romantic "Theatre of the Feast of the Dead,"[21] based on unifying myth and effective ritual. This necroperformance, instead of placing the Polish experience of death in pagan rituals performed somewhere in the mythical peripheries of Europe, critically places Polishness within European culture, its history, and politics. The necroperformance thus manifests itself as the essence of a new anthropological design, founded on the experience of the Great War and recorded in the modern theatre formula.

This unique type of relationship between theatre and anthropology, where historical experience was a factor in the deconstruction of the idea of wholeness and fullness understood on the metaphysical plane, is tellingly revealed by the case of Bronisław Malinowski and Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz (commonly known as Witkacy). In 1914, when he was staying in the United Kingdom, Malinowski invited his closest childhood friend on a trip to Australia and New Guinea, to jointly observe and document the lives of the inhabitants of the Trobriand Islands. The exotic journey embarked on by the future father of social anthropology and the future modern theatre artist served an ulterior purpose, motivated by a very personal and somewhat melodramatic impulse—to help Witkiewicz regain the will to live in the face of ever-mounting suicidal thoughts after the suicide of his fiancée, Jadwiga Janczewska (who was likely pregnant with the child of Karol Szymanowski).[22] The future author of "Unwashed Souls" (1936) ultimately never reached the Trobriand Islands, and never fulfilled his mission to photograph and illustrate the sexual lives of the "savages" for Malinowski. The outbreak of the First World War caused the two men to go

21 See Leszek Kolankiewicz, *Dziady. Teatr święta zmarłych* (Gdańsk: słowo/obraz terytoria, 1999).

22 See Janusz Degler, "O pobycie Witkacego w Rosji w świetle dokumentów," in *Witkacego portret wielokrotny. Szkice i materiały do biografii (1918–1939)* (Warsaw: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 2009), p. 474.

their separate ways (and eventually put an end to their friendship): Malinowski remained in Australia and New Guinea to lay the foundation of his fieldwork in the direct observation of the natives, and attempted to record their rituals objectively, while Witkiewicz abruptly decided to return to Europe in search of live historical experience, which he hoped to begin by becoming a soldier in the tsar's army.

The divergent paths of these two Polish men—one a part of history within his own culture, the other isolated from his own culture to create a human laboratory among a remote people—exemplifies the symbolic rift between anthropology and modern theatre. The sense of disintegration resulting from the men's experience of history was quickly internalized by both of them, though in dissimilar ways. Witkiewicz, "seeing inadvertently the real face of the 20th century,"[23] recognized his own transformation into a permanently divided self, which found its expression both in his 1916 photograph *Portret wielokrotny* (Multiple Portrait), taken during his time in the tsarist army; and in the ironic interpretation of the transformation of Gustav into Konrad from Mickiewicz's *Forefathers' Eve* in *622 upadki Bunga* (622 Downfalls of Bungo, 1972, posthumous): "Obiit Bungo, natus est Witkacy" (Bungo is Dead, Witkacy is Born). Meanwhile, Malinowski endured his own split between the objective "I" and subjective "I" in order to be able to control the reality he was studying, as seen in his documentation of his scientific and personal life in the islands. This diametrical opposition between Malinowski and Witkiewicz was brilliantly articulated by Michael Young in his biography of the anthropologist:

> For Malinowski, "the purpose in keeping a diary and trying to control one's life and thoughts at every moment must be to consolidate life, to integrate one's thinking, to avoid fragmenting themes." Witkiewicz,

23 Konstanty Puzyna, *Witkacy*, intro. and ed. Janusz Degler (Warsaw: Oficyna Wydawnicza Errata, 1999), p. 57.

> in contrast, sought and relished "fragmenting themes" as essential kindling for his creative art (his experiments in drug taking were similarly motivated). He was intrigued by masks and multiple identities (he coined hundreds of nicknames for himself), seemingly indifferent to the "unified personality" for which Malinowski so earnestly yearned. In a word, Witkiewicz sought dislocation rather than integration.[24]

This disparity between the two friends' perspectives—an anthropologist and a theatre artist—seems to have permanently defined not only their individual work but also the status of both fields in the 20th century: the foundations of anthropology as ahistorical and driven to construct a unified image of reality; and the fragmentary paradigm of 20th-century theatre, based on the experience of 20th-century history and on the attempts to understand its fundamental driving forces.

The outbreak of war awakened in Witkiewicz—as he wrote in a letter to his family on August 6, 1914—a sense of "denying the only chance to live on." Joining the war was "the only act I was still capable of after I lost my artistic talent," which, in contrast to the thoughts of death and suicide that interminably accompanied him during his travels, thoughts he deemed "as hideous as life," gave him hope of a "useful death."[25] We must remember that Witkiewicz—opposing the beliefs of his father, a great admirer of Piłsudski, known in the family as Uncle Ziuk—did not join the legions but rather traveled to Petrograd as a Russian subject to join the tsarist army in November 1914. To many, this decision seemed incomprehensible, and the artist himself, after many years, explained it as an effect of the "global political-ideological chaos," amidst which the feeling of being a Russian citizen compelled him to "loyally report to

24 Michael W. Young, *Malinowski's Kiriwina: Fieldwork Photography 1915–1918* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), p. 14.

25 Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz, "Letters to Bronisław Malinowski," trans. Daniel Gerould, Michał Kłobukowski, *Konteksty* nos. 1–4 (2000), p. 266.

that country's army."[26] In Witkiewicz's decision we may also see something of a patricidal gesture—a desire to rebel against his father's worldview. Yet, particularly in light of the later "Niemytych duszach" (Unwashed Souls, 1936), that great collective psychoanalysis of the Polish nation, it is also possible to discern Witkiewicz's orientalist fascination with the "wild and barbaric East," in which he identified the potential for social and cultural change in Poland.

"While other populations, roughly national, have developed their cultures, thus creating grounds for an already self-conscious civilization with the universal tendency [...] what has been going on here?" asked Witkiewicz, irritated by the political particularism supporting the ethnic and religious intolerance in Poland.[27] He perceived greater potential in the transmission of Eastern values than in any combination of the Polish tradition of nobility and European democracy. This Western-leaning tendency did not take into account the very foundation of Polish society: "its very basis—the peasants."[28] "Primitive" Russia could play a strategic role for Poland, as both states belonged to the Slavonic community, but Russia—unlike Poland, the country of "mock people, mock labor, mock state"—had a "structure."[29] The revolution of 1917, which transformed ordinary citizens into a nation with a bold presence in world history, "an experiment on a fantastically grand scale, marking again the beginning of the end of the deceitful era of democracy and the domination of capital,"[30] confirmed for Witkiewicz

26 Jerzy M. Rytard, "Witkacy, czyli o życiu po drugiej stronie rozpaczy," in *Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz, człowiek i twórca. Księga pamiątkowa*, ed. Tadeusz Kotarbiński and Jerzy Eugeniusz Płomieński (Warsaw: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1957), p. 280.

27 Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz, "Niemyte dusze," in *Dzieła wybrane*, vol. 1 (Warsaw: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1985), p. 718.

28 Ibid., p. 723.

29 Ibid., p. 716.

30 Ibid., p. 715.

his youthful intuition and choices, despite the deep disappointment in humanity that came with his experiences in the war.

Before Witkiewicz could confront the great facts of history, he was first called up (after completing an accelerated course in the officers' academy) in May 1915 as a warrant officer to the 172nd Auxiliary Infantry Battalion, and then, on September 24, to the Pavlovsky Guard Regiment, where he temporarily led the fourth company and where he eventually advanced to the rank of second lieutenant. On July 17, 1916, Witkiewicz took part in the battle on the Stokhid River, whose banks were the site of "endless graves" resulting from Aleksei Brusilov's May offensive in the Volhynia region. In that valley cemetery, still awash in the strong stench of rotting corpses, where, as one witness of the Volhynia battle wrote, "streams of warm blood seeped into the clay dirt of the trenches, into the moss and forest soil, into the furrows of the abandoned fields, as it flowed from the mangled bodies of those multilingual throngs of young people,"[31] the Pavlovsky Regiment saw what real carnage was.

That battle on the Stokhid River was the dramatic conclusion of Witkiewicz's life as a soldier. He was wounded and subsequently evacuated to a hospital at the rear of the battle zone, and soon thereafter to a "lazaretto for the wounded founded by the wives of Pavlovsky Guard Regiment officers" in Petrograd.[32] In this, the writer experienced the fate of the typical Great War soldier in the third year (the bloodiest one) of the conflict. He landed in a military hospital, a makeshift medical care site but also, perhaps more significantly for many, a place where the trauma of warfare made itself known. As Stefan Okołowicz writes:

31 Cited in Krzysztof Dubiński, *Wojna Witkacego, czyli kumboł w galifetach* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Iskry, 2015), p. 125.
32 Ibid., p. 168.

> Here we must recall that Witkiewicz, having suffered an injury on July 17, 1916, also experienced psychological trauma and suffered from "symptoms of traumatic neurosis, thereby requiring outpatient hydrotherapy treatment, massage, and electroconvulsive therapy." In a letter to Bronisław Malinowski, he confides in his friend that he feels awful and that he will return to the front once his poor psychological state subsides, and that he does not want to die at the moment but also has no great will to live.[33]

Though a medical committee report dated September 19, 1916, states that the "consequences of the injury are under control" and that Second Lieutenant Witkiewicz "may return to active duty,"[34] he never did return to the front. The strong impact of his frontline ordeal, the "terrifying, simply unbelievable paroxysms of fear, which he experienced repeatedly while under fire in the first line of trenches, or when, semiconscious from anxiety, shaking like jelly, he led his men to attack the German position,"[35] induced in the artist symptoms of neurasthenia typical of a soldier exhausted by the war—a kind of psychological barrier preventing his return to the front. "During the Great War, this kind of trauma—from bouts of aggressive madness to debilitating depression and even to a dissociative stupor—was a common phenomenon on all the front lines."[36] Perhaps it was also that—as Krzysztof Dubiński suggests—the massacre on the Stokhid induced a radical manifestation of symptoms of the bipolar affective disorder that had plagued Witkiewicz for years.[37] Also suffering from insomnia, nervous

33 Stefan Okołowicz, "'WITKACY RZUCIŁ SIĘ JAK SZCZERBATY NA SUCHARY'. Witkiewicz w czasie pierwszej wojny światowej," in *Krytyka Literacka* (blog), krytykaliteracka.blogspot.de/2012/02/rozprawa-stefan-okoowicz-witkacy-rzuci.html, accessed September 15, 2015.
34 "Świadectwo Komisji Lekarskiej," in Janusz Degler, *Witkacego portret wielokrotny*, p. 498.
35 Rytard, *Witkacy, czyli o życiu po drugiej stronie rozpaczy*, p. 281.
36 Dubiński, *Wojna Witkacego, czyli kumboł w galifetach*, p. 166.
37 Ibid., p. 171.

breakdowns, and apathy, Witkiewicz was first given medical leave and then assigned to the fourth auxiliary unit of the Pavlovsky Guard Regiment—the so-called convalescence unit. That assignment allowed him to go back to Saint Petersburg, where he resumed social life and his artistic work,[38] producing portraits and doing set design work for the Artistic Literary Theatre in Saint Petersburg.[39]

From that specific position of "distanced participation," Witkiewicz observed his own unit's involvement in the revolution of 1917,[40] which he responded to twenty years after the war in "Unwashed Souls":

> In recent times I have been given over to thinking a lot about the view (I cannot put it otherwise, as, unfortunately, I looked at it as if from a balcony, unable to accept any input due to schizoid inhibitions) of the Russian Revolution, from February 1917 till June 1918. I observed this astonishing happening from very close up, being an officer of the Pavlovsky Guard Regiment, which had started it. I believe anyone who could not experience that phenomenon from up close to be an unfortunate cripple.[41]

Could it be that in formulating his conviction on the spiritual ineptitude of those who did not take an active part in history being made, Witkiewicz may also have had in mind his friend Malinowski, who had chosen the road of a politically uninvolved scientist? The fact that in his postwar work Witkiewicz became the first serious critic of Malinowski's fieldwork and

38 See ibid., pp. 175–78.

39 See Degler, *Witkacego portret wielokrotny*, p. 478. See also Dubiński, *Wojna Witkacego, czyli kumboł w galifetach*, pp. 228–30.

40 This applies mainly to the February Revolution, which began with the revolt of Witkiewicz's company. It is certain that the writer did not take direct part in the October Revolution, as in the period of August 24 to November 15 he was on medical leave, after which his service in the Russian army came to an end, when he was delegated to the Supreme Polish Military Committee in November.

41 Witkiewicz, "Niemyte dusze," pp. 717–18.

anthropological writings,[42] which he interpreted as a means of exploiting the "savages" for the sake of an academic career in the UK,[43] seems to support that assumption.

Bronisław Malinowski, who left the European continent on an Austrian passport, became a citizen of an enemy state after the outbreak of the war. This posed fundamental complications for his studies, as it restricted his ability to move freely among British colonies in the Pacific.[44] In his paper "On Ethnographic Self-Fashioning," James Clifford astutely notices the Trobriand Island researcher's refugee status and, consequently, "a peculiarly Polish cultural distance" resulting from being from a nation

> that had since the eighteenth century existed only as a fiction—but an intensely believed, serious fiction—of collective identity. Moreover, Poland's peculiar social structure, with its broadly based small nobility, made aristocratic values unusually evident at all levels of society. Poland's cultivated exiles were not likely to be charmed by Europe's reigning bourgeois values; they would keep a certain remove. This viewpoint outside bourgeois society [...] is perhaps a peculiarly advantageous "ethnographic" position.[45]

42 Stuart Baker writes in more detail on Witkiewicz's polemic with Malinowski, especially concerning the latter's scientific treatment of religious beliefs, his insistence on their biological basis, and the resulting overtly pragmatic interpretation of them. See Stuart Baker, "Witkiewicz and Malinowski: The Pure Form of Magic, Science and Religion," *The Polish Review,* vol. 18, nos. 1–2 (1973).

43 See the manuscript of Malinowski's "622 upadków Bunga, czyli Demoniczna kobieta," annotated by Witkiewicz, in *Dzieła wybrane*, vol. 5, ed. Anna Micińska (Warsaw: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1978), p. 423.

44 See Małgorzata Czermińska, "Podróż egzotyczna i zwrot do wnętrza. Narracje niefikcjonalne pomiędzy 'orientalizmem' a intmistyką," in *Teksty Drugie* no. 4 (2009), p. 19.

45 James Clifford, "On Ethnographic Self-Fashioning: Conrad and Malinowski," in James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture. Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1988), p. 98.

Clifford asserts that despite Malinowski's rational mask he was an exceptionally theatrical character and his work in ethnography was a kind of pose, a role allowing him to prevail over himself, and also rightfully points out that "Malinowski flirted with various colonial white roles;"[46] yet he fails to reach conclusions that connected the white-man role-play with the above-cited accurate description of Poland's social structure, so distinct from the rest of Europe's.

Providing an interesting context for this is Malinowski's 1930 essay "Culture as Personal Experience,"[47] in which the anthropologist mentions his childhood years spent among peasants in the isolated village of Ponice in the Carpathian Mountains, treating it as an introduction to the "duality, multiplicity of the world of culture":

> As a child, I was surround by racial and cultural differences. They formed part of the background of my earliest experiences. There were the lowland peasants of the plains, an inferior "caste" of peasants described in the works of Reymont, and there were the Carpathian highlanders, the Górale. There were also Jews, and Russians and Austrian Germans (the swaggering Austrian officers, as I recall, were not appreciated by the Ruthenians). The Jews were always on the social horizon with their different religious and occupational character. They looked different. They wore "corkscrew" sideburns and long gabardines. They also smelled different, of garlic, onion, goose and goat, and they were afflicted with scabies. They were untouchable, infinitely more so than the blacks of the southern United States.[48]

46 Ibid., p. 105.

47 I cite this fragment after Grażyna Kubica, who received an edited and cleaned-up copy of Malinowski's text from Michael Young during the VI European Association of Social Anthropologists Conference in Krakow in 2000.

48 Cited in Grażyna Kubica, "Wstęp," in Bronisław Malinowski, *Dziennik w ścisłym znaczeniu tego wyrazu,* (Krakow: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2008), p. 7.

This passage gives us an informative picture of the social stratification still prevalent in Poland at the threshold of the 20th century, a situation that Witkiewicz, using the "Freudian brush," attempted to address in the amalgamation of history and anthropology that was "Unwashed Souls". It also demonstrates how Malinowski, already a respected anthropologist, constructed his position as a member of white colonial Poland, where the role equated at the time to that of the black people in the United States was assigned to peasants, highlanders, Jews, Ruthenians, and Austrian Germans. The inferiority complex that Malinowski had next to white colonial Brits can also be detected in his eventual replacement of the word "natives," initially used to denote the Trobrianders in *Diary*, with the word "niggers." I believe Malinowski picked up this slur, derogatory yet commonly used in the colonies, as a right of advancement, when he began to feel more comfortable as a Pole in English territory. Looking at it from this perspective, Malinowski's works are not, as Clifford would have wanted, simply "records of a white man at the frontier, at points of danger and disintegration,"[49] but rather records of a Pole as a European "savage" attaining the position of a white man/scientist through the increasing legitimacy of his study of "other savages" at a European university using the English language, which enjoyed a privileged position in the field of anthropology.

Finding himself far removed from the armed conflict and tormented by "a chronic, almost subconscious pang of conscience,"[50] a sense of guilt for having left behind his mother and friends, Malinowski nonetheless found a way to sublimate his lack of involvement in the war through his fieldwork in the Trobriand Islands. It is therefore no wonder that he described

49 Clifford, "On Ethnographic Self-Fashioning: Conrad and Malinowski," p. 105.

50 Cited in Michael W. Young, *Malinowski: Odyssey of an Anthropologist 1884–1920* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2004), p. 505.

his research expedition (specifically his return to the islands in 1917) as an "Odyssey in the savage and dangerous island of New Guinea,"[51] thinking of himself as an Odysseus, doing his duty in a far-off land amidst strangers, and sharing the Polish soldiers' ordeal of not being able to come home. On November 10, 1917, the researcher records in his *Diary:* "This morning I am waiting in vain for the 'Itaka.' I realize that if I manage to master my momentary moral disorder, really to isolate myself, to start keeping the diary with real determination, my stay here will not be a waste of time."[52]

Perhaps this transposition of his own experience onto that of soldiers fighting in Europe was nothing more than pure coincidence—the cutter that took Malinowski from Samar Island to the Trobriand Islands was called the "Ithaca," named after the home island of its former owner, a Greek trader named Mick George.[53] Interestingly, the "huge, lean, stooping figure" of the old Greek, his "haggard, clumsily but characteristically cut face," once reminded Malinowski of "Achilles in a drawing by Wyspiański," and another time of "the followers and comrades of Odysseus." These literary analogies allowed the anthropologist to find in that land of radical unfamiliarity "a kind of freemasonic community of souls on the grounds of this Mediterranean Kultur-influence."[54]

Meanwhile, seeming anything but coincidental, and at that rather typical, are the transpositions made by Malinowski in his publications summing up his odyssey: *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* from 1922 and *The Sexual Life of Savages* from 1929. Though meant to be records of direct observation and of an attempt to objectively capture how the foreign culture worked

51 Ibid. p. 479.

52 Cited in Bronisław Malinowski, *A Diary in the Strict Sense of the Term* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1967), p. 110.

53 The cutter was subsequently acquired by Billy Nacock, and then by the Auerbach brothers, who traveled to the Trobriand Islands with Malinowski.

54 Cited in Young, *Malinowski: Odyssey of an Anthropologist 1884–1920*, p. 499.

and what it meant to the natives ("I am mainly relying on what I was told by my native informants,"[55]) they were often an expression of the anthropologist's subjective perspective, which is after all situated in the context of his own culture.[56] This paradox of fieldwork was well recognized by Malinowski when he described the specifics of the anthropologist's observations as a necessity for understanding the natives through his own psychology and knowledge.[57]

In the context of the carnage taking place in Europe during Malinowski's work in the islands, particularly interesting are his descriptions of the Trobrianders' funeral rituals. These accounts of the ethnographer's direct experience amidst "savagery" reveal his rationalistic perspective as a European citizen:

> Throughout this ritual, the unfortunate remains of the man are constantly worried. His body is twice exhumed; it is cut up; some of its bones are peeled out of the carcass, are handled, are given to one party and then to another, until at last they come to a final rest. And what makes the whole performance most disconcerting is the absence of the real protagonist—*Hamlet* without the Prince of Denmark.[58]

55 Bronisław Malinowski, *The Sexual Life of Savages in North-Western Melanesia: An Ethnographic Account of Courtship, Marriage, and Family Life Among the Natives of the Trobriand Islands, British New Guinea* (London: George Routledge & Sons,1929), p. xxii.

56 James Clifford brilliantly presents this issue in his "On Ethnographic Self-Fashioning." Clifford focusses his analysis not so much on Malinowski's research but on the fictional "I" taking shape in the anthropologist's writing, which, as he addresses in relation to Stephen Greenblatt, "is always located with reference to its *culture* and coded modes of expression, its *language*." Whether one likes it or not, that subjectivity "maneuvers within constraints and possibilities given by an institutionalized set of collective practices and codes." Clifford studies the articulation of such a subjectivity in Malinowski's work, contrary to the conclusions of earlier critics, treating *Diary* and *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* as particular experiments in writing, in which the "I" comes to the fore. James Clifford, "On Ethnographic Self-Fashioning: Conrad and Malinowski," p. 94

57 Malinowski, *The Sexual Life of Savages in North-Western Melanesia*, p. xxi.

58 Malinowski, *The Sexual Life of Savages in North-Western Melanesia*, p. 126–27.

This description effectively demonstrates how, unwittingly, Malinowski projected his own convictions onto this foreign culture as he grappled with the specifics of their necroperformance, which among the "savages" was completely natural but to European sensibilities comes across as utterly scandalous due to the belief in the sanctity of the deceased's remains. It is however worth asking what aspect of the symbolism generated the anthropologist's consternation regarding the "absence of the real protagonist?" Was it not a consequence of the fundamental conviction in modern philosophy and ethics that a person reduced to biology, animality, death, and existence as nothing more than a pile of bones ceased to be human? Malinowski, as a representative of reason-based subjectivity and of the ability to use language to control one's own drive as something fundamentally distinct from natural instinct—criteria that lay at the heart of Western philosophy's distinction between the human world and the animal world[59]—was confronted in his Ithaca with a tribe of individuals who eluded European culture's attempts at subjectification.

A peculiar flip-side to Malinowski's perspective appears in the testimony of soldiers attempting to rationalize their experience of others dying by exotifying the experience of seeing dead bodies. G. A. Wroński, a Pole fighting in the German army's Poznan Regiment, describes bodies on the battlefield:

> Slowly and cautiously we move forward. We switch between walking single file and side by side, and we hide the bodies we encounter along the way. Most of the bodies have turned black. They look like black-skinned men. Their lips are pursed, the whites of their eyes glisten, their bodies are bloated and their stomachs distended. Swarming

59 See Paweł Mościcki, "Zwierzę, które umieram. Heidegger, Derrida, Agamben," in *Konteksty* no. 4 (2009).

> all around are flies and bugs. There is no need to look for them, they make themselves known from afar by the stench of decay.[60]

The juxtaposition of these two perspectives effectively demonstrates how the Others, their domains occupied by European civilization and their lives treated by the colonizing nations as their negative reference point for the reinforcement of their own identity, turned out to be perceived as the embodied expression of the Europeans' own (repressed) fears, or, to use Freud's terminology, of *das Unheimliche* ("It may be true that the uncanny [*unheimlich*] is something which is secretly familiar [*heimlich-heimisch*], which has undergone repression and then returned from it, and that everything that is uncanny fulfils this condition."[61]) Though colonialists wanted their aggressions to be interpreted as a grand cultural undertaking, offering liberation and enlightenment to other peoples, colonialism was in effect the antithesis of culture, a manifestation of barbarism. The First World War was proof that the unbelievable violence, the wild aggression and the desire to dominate were not at all something new and strange but something long familiar that had been repressed only to cruelly return. Though nowhere in Freud's classic essay on "The Uncanny" do we encounter a literal parallel between the war and *das Unheimliche*, it is difficult to ignore the sense that this text, delving deeply into the essence of death, written one year after the conclusion of the Great War, in which Freud's three sons fought despite their father's objections, was an expression of a deep disillusionment with European civilization on the part of the father of psychoanalysis.

In his 1915 essay "Thoughts for the Times on War and Death," written during the war, Freud formulated a thesis on

60 G. A. Wroński, *Pamiętnik Nieznanego Żołnierza. Przeżycia wojenne na froncie zachodnim 1914–1919* (Śrem: self-published, 1934), pp. 22–23.

61 See Sigmund Freud, "The Uncanny," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud,* vol. XVII (London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psychoanalysis, 1955), p. 244.

the origins of violence as a part of our dysfunctional attitude toward death, which involves ignoring something that is a natural part of life—its end. He also points out the state's and the nation's repression of the individual through their demand of total obedience and their generation of "social fear" in the individual, which in turn leads to reactive and compensatory violence in war. We read that "there is an end, too, to the suppression of evil passions, and men perpetrate deeds of cruelty, fraud, treachery and barbarity so incompatible with their level of civilization that one would have thought them impossible."[62] Freud's extreme pessimism about human nature and his explicit condemnation of barbarism in "Why War?" arose from a 1932 epistolary exchange with Albert Einstein on the subject of war and culture. Here Freud expresses his utter impotence in the face of "intellectually sanctioned violence," which at that time was being accepted as a common right. Dispelling any illusions, he writes:

> Conflicts of interest between man and man are resolved, in principle, by the recourse to violence. It is the same in the animal kingdom, from which man cannot claim exclusion; nevertheless, men are also prone to conflicts of opinion, touching, on occasion, the loftiest peaks of abstract thought, which seem to call for settlement by quite another method. This refinement is, however, a late development. To start with, group force was the factor which, in small communities, decided points of ownership and the question which man's will was to prevail. Very soon physical force was implemented, then replaced, by the use of various adjuncts; he proved the victor whose weapon was the better, or handled the more skillfully.[63]

62 Sigmund Freud, "Thoughts for the Times on War and Death," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud,* vol. XIV (London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psychoanalysis, 1955), p. 279.
63 Sigmund Freud, "Why War?" in *Civilization, War, and Death*, ed. John Rickman (New York: Hogarth Press, 1939), p. 84–85.

As Freund formulated his extremely pessimistic judgment of war and human nature, Polish theatre was returning to the figure of Odysseus the soldier. The first adaptation of Wyspiański's *The Return of Odysseus* in the interwar period took place at the Municipal Theatresin Lviv on November 29, 1932, directed by Janusz Strachocki, who also appeared in the title role.[64] The theatre's director, Wilam Horzyca, a former soldier in the Polish Legions and a great admirer of Wyspiański's play, was responsible for choosing the play.[65] It was his vision that ultimately shaped the final form of the production. Horzyca's interpretation overtly exposed Wyspiański's prophetic depiction of identity irreversibly changed by war: "Odysseus—the hero of our times … And we are all Odysseuses today."[66] At the same time he underscored the ethical/political aspect of the text:

> It was not the imaginary Ithaca that compromised Odysseus. It was he who compromised the earth, murdering and laying it to waste because his soul was full of wrath and vengeance. It was he, Odysseus, a pilgrim, a vagrant, who rendered Ithaca a bloody field sowed with men's

64 *The Return of Odysseus* was performed together with *The Death of Ophelia* and *Weimar*. The stage sets were designed by Andrzej Pronaszko.

65 "On 04.09.1914 he joined the Polish Legions and served in the 4th Auxiliary Battalion. In February 1915 he was transferred to the 5th Infantry Regiment of the Polish Legions. He fought in the battles of Konary, Ożarów, Tarłów, Urzędowo. Due to a heart condition, in October 1915 he was admitted to the Convalescence House in Kamieńsk. From February to October 1916, he served in the command station in Lviv as a staff member of the accounting department. In November 1916 he was delegated to the commissariat in Baranowicze. In August 1917 he was re-delegated to the accounting department in Lviv. In January 1918 he was discharged from the army. From April 1918 he worked as a German language teacher at High School No. 7 in Lviv. On 29.11.1918, he reported to the Polish Army Command Station in Lviv. During the war against the Ukrainians and Bolsheviks, he served in the rearguard. In the period of the Second Republic of Poland he worked with Polish Radio, and in 1929–37 he served as an editor of the pro-Piłsudski periodical *Droga*." www.mjp.najlepszemedia.pl/wykaz-legionistow/wykaz/legionista/horzyca, accessed January 12, 2015.

66 Wilam Horzyca, "Odysa powrót do Ojczyzny," in *O dramacie*, ed. Lidia Kuchtówna, Konstanty Puzyna (Warsaw: Wydawnictwa Artystyczne i Filmowe, 1969), p. 170.

> corpses—it was he who turned it into hell. […] It was not the earth that betrayed Odysseus; it was he who betrayed the earth and ignited a fire of blood and hatred.[67]

Based on memories of his own involvement in the Great War, Horzyca wrote not about the Polish soldier returning from a war that was not his own war, but instead clearly universalized that experience as the experience of the European subject who, in the name of enlightened ideas, essentially slaughtered himself as the Other. Horzyca's reading of *The Return of Odysseus* unveils in Wyspiański's drama not only the repressed, "savage" aspect of subjectivity described by Freud as *unheimlich* but also, and above all, what Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer later called the "dialectic of enlightenment"; from the moment when humankind began to exert sovereign rule over all the earth they initiated a process of gradual alienation from what they ruled over. Consequently, the reason of rational society gave way to merciless violence against its own people, which in turn spawned modernity's barbaric wars.

There is no doubt that in his final completed drama, Wyspiański reinterpreted the myth in a modern spirit, discovering in the figure of Odysseus not so much a model of the ancient hero and wanderer fleeing the curse of the gods as a model of the war criminal who cannot escape his mounting fear and compulsive violence. Wyspiański's Odysseus, whose return home begins with the murderous slaughter of the Swineherd (Eumaeus) on his own land, is like a beast more animal than human, an image that anticipates the return from the modern war of a man/soldier who is incapable of coping with the nightmarish memory of the crimes he has committed with his own hands. That is why this Odysseus stands before us almost denuded, caught in the snare of extreme anthropocentricism, on "the wholly enlightened earth," as Adorno and Horkheimer

67 Ibid., pp. 171, 172.

Fig. 27: Wacław Szymborski's photographs from the performance based on Stanisław Wyspiański's *Powrót Odysa* (The Return of Odysseus), Krakow 1917.

write, "radiant with triumphant calamity."[68] He is deprived of the use of language—for two acts the protagonist remains silent; and identity—to Medon's question of "Who is there?" he replies "No one,"[69] and he assures Telemachus, "I am for the people: no one—and I stand for nothing."[70] Wyspiański's Odysseus embodies a prehistory of subjectivity, much like the Odysseus interpreted by the authors of *Dialectic of Enlightenment*: "In reality, Odysseus, the subject, denies his own identity, which makes him a subject, and he preserves his life by

68 Max Horkheimer, Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Palo Alto, Calif: Stanford University Press, 2002), p. 1.
69 Stanisław Wyspiański, "Powrót Odysa," in Stanisław Wyspiański, *Achilleis, Powrót Odysa*, ed. Jan Nowakowski (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1984), p. 232.
70 Ibid., p. 222.

mimicking the amorphous realm."[71] Examining the similarity in the sound of the two Greek words *Odysseus* and *Udeis* ("nobody"), Horkheimer and Adorno reflect on techniques of the reason to make the difference the same: "In his extremity Odysseus becomes aware of dualism, as he discovers that an identical word can mean different things."[72] In the silent Odysseus who assumes the name No one, Horkheimer and Adorno identify an Other rapt with mortal fear, an Other who has been torn away from himself: "Udeis, who compulsively proclaims himself to be Odysseus, already bears features of the Jew who, in fear of death, continues to boast of a superiority which itself stems from the fear of death."[73]

By no means does my reading of *The Return of Odysseus* intend to reveal the deviations and discrepancies in Wyspiański's drama from Homer's original in order to find in the poet's interpretation a discursive expression of the "crisis of modern anthropology and ethics."[74] The aim is to attempt to reconstruct the figure of the returning Odysseus as an origin, defined by Wyspiański, of the fundamental experience of a subject of modernity—reduced to just a physical existence, to "bare life."[75]

71 Horkheimer, Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, p. 53.

72 Ibid., p.47.

73 Ibid., p. 54.

74 See Ewa Miodońska-Brookes, "'Powrót Odysa' i 'Zygmunt August' Stanisława Wyspiańskiego. Kontrastowe koncepcje ludzkiej kondycji," in *"Mam ten dar bowiem: patrzę się inaczej". Szkice o twórczości Stanisława Wyspiańskiego* (Krakow: Universitas, 1997), p. 49. Ewa Miodońska-Brookes shows how Wyspiański, using only a "set of personal names, because we can no longer talk about characters in the true sense of the word, several facts grouped in a sequence having a different order and interdependencies than the Homeric narrative, and the most general framework of a conflict between Odysseus and Penelope's suitors," created in the figure of Odysseus a unique paradigm of the modern entity as someone who oscillates between the nightmare of recurring memories and the yearning for death as a form of forgetting.

75 See Giorgio Agamben, *Homo sacer. Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Palo Alto, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1998).

In *The Return of Odysseus* what strikes us from the very beginning is the stunted and wild body of the soldier returning from war, rapt with fear and aggression, which becomes a medium of history (not myth) and a symbol of real violence (not destiny). Odysseus the soldier is but a body who is the perpetrator of brutal, unbridled repetition, an example of a nearly animal aggression. Contrary to the words of the Swineherd and to the desires of Telemachus (who clearly bears the features of Hamlet, but without the figure of Hamlet himself), it is not a "Nightmare," "Phantasm," or "Father's ghost" that haunts Ithaca. With bitter irony Wyspiański invokes the romantic myth of the phantom when, in the scuffle with the Swineherd, he has Odysseus speak the trenchant words "Take a look! It is a phantom you see!" after which he ruthlessly kills the servant with a stick and escapes the scene of the crime uttering "There! Lie here, you dog."[76] Remaining on the stage is the Swineherd's collapsed body, which becomes livid in front of our eyes as Telemachus arrives, and then dies. Moments later, the crime of beating a servant over the head with a stick is repeated by Odysseus's son, who will find blood, and not his father's spirit, in this ruthless mimetic replication. These two viciously murdered corpses initiate a series of murders and replications of the crime committed by Odysseus as he returns to the stage, when he finally recognizes his own home and homeland as a hell and a graveyard "reeking of carcasses," and identifies the "remains—human bones"[77] all around him as the ultimate reality, of which he is both a witness and the cause: "I am alive. I've killed off everything—I've pushed everything away … Nothing, nothing but me; —nothing—nothing—nothing in front of me."[78]

In literary history *The Return of Odysseus* is seen as Wyspiański's most pessimistic work, as the poet's final judgment

76 Wyspiański, *Powrót Odysa*, p. 205.
77 Ibid., p. 283.
78 Ibid.

of man. He puts forth "a vision that is most deeply tragic, most intensely bringing out the dark aspects of man's fate, born out of the experience of deep pessimism and despair."[79] The text also betrays a strong influence of Nietzsche, in particular his concept of ressentiment:

> The beginning of the slaves' revolt in morality occurs when *ressentiment* itself turns creative and gives birth to values: the *ressentiment* of those beings who, denied the proper response of action, compensate for it only with imaginary revenge. Whereas all noble morality grows out of a triumphant saying "yes" to itself, slave morality says "no" on principle to everything that is "outside," "other," "non-self": and this "no" is its creative deed.[80]

Wyspiański's Odysseus—who rarely commits crimes of his own will, yet repeats his crimes and is unable to free himself of the memory of repeating them—is a person of *ressentiment*. He does not commit his crimes each time to establish reality and himself as the subject, a primeval unity of body and mind, but simply to survive and endure. His actions are never confidently executed, as they would be by a master, but rather are reactive, as befitting a slave. They reveal Odysseus's fear of death.

As a Nobody possessing Nothing, sequestered in a space isolated from the outside world and doomed to murder repeatedly as an impulse driven by the internalized memory of his crime, Wyspiański's Odysseus is without a doubt a radical conception of subjectivity, a conception deeply rooted in modernity's cultural, social, and political changes. The idea of a man deprived of his homeland that Wyspiański discovers in the European myth of Odysseus brings to mind Giorgio Agamben's philosoph-

79 Miodońska-Brookes, "'Powrót Odysa' i 'Zygmunt August' Stanisława Wyspiańskiego," p. 47.
80 Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 20.

ical ruminations on the status of the countryless—refugees and political prisoners—whose existence is reduced to little else but a biological life riddled with fear. In his *Homo Sacer*, Agamben claims that the separated enclosed space established by law, making it possible to "protect" society by removing potential threats from the social environment, has become paradigmatic of modernity, "the Nomos of the Modern."[81]

Operating within such a territory is a sovereign force that affects the human body, a force that presses natural human life into the service of the mechanisms of state authority, often military in nature. The prototypes for this biopolitical space were the concentration camps, as places where military authorities contained civilian populations, that sprang up beginning in the late 19th century—not in Europe but mainly on islands controlled by colonial powers. The first concentration camps were set up in Cuba by the Spanish authorities in 1896 for non-insurgent peasants who often sheltered the rebels. Three years later the British authorities established concentration camps for Boer women and children fighting against the English, as did the Americans for rebels during their occupation of the Philippines.[82] In a sense, concentration camps constituted a structural reiteration of POW camps, which had existed for a long time and were regulated by law.[83] Evident in this reiteration is the analogy I suggested earlier: between the condition of a soldier who experiences war and the condition of a subject of modernity.[84]

81 See Agamben, *Homo sacer*.

82 See Andrzej J. Kamiński, *Koszmar niewolnictwa. Obozy koncentracyjne od 1896 do dziś* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Przedświt, 1990).

83 By two Hague Conventions, in 1899 and 1907.

84 This is confirmed by the history of internment camps just after World War I, including ones in Poland, where, for example, a former camp for legionnaires was repurposed into, initially, a camp for German soldiers and later for civilians who inhabited former German lands.

Another early concentration camp was built by the Germans. Prior to the First World War, from 1904 to 1907, the Germans built concentration camps in their colony of German South West Africa (modern-day Namibia). As the gravely ill Wyspiański was writing new versions of *The Return of Odysseus*, the native population of the tiny Shark Island in modern-day Namibia was gradually being eradicated. Just after the outbreak of the Herero Revolt in 1904, the authorities of the German colony built a massive quarantine station for German soldiers on the island. Soon thereafter, on the island's southern end, they built a concentration camp amidst rocky outcroppings and fenced it off from the rest of the island with barbed wire. In 1905 the site turned from a concentration camp to an extermination camp where the Herero and Nama people were starved, forced into backbreaking labor, and ultimately killed. These barbaric events were documented not only in the reports of local missionaries but also in photos taken by the German officers, which were later used to produce a series of illustrated postcards depicting—as described by the British diamond hunter Fred Cornell—"wholesale executions and similar gruesome doings to death of these poor natives."[85] In the process Shark Island became known as Death Island,[86] where even the bodies of the dead were mistreated. Some were buried in shallow graves in the desert, some simply dumped into the ocean or eaten by jackals, while others were used in medical and racial research.[87] The exploitation of body parts, primarily skulls, contributed not only to the development of a dreadful industry for the sale of bones but also to the "enrichment" of museum and

85 Cited in David Olusoga, Casper W. Erichsen, *The Kaiser's Holocaust: Germany's Forgotten Genocide and the Colonial Roots of Nazism* (London: Faber & Faber, 2010), p. 214.

86 The Shark Island camp was renamed Death Island by the German garrison in Lüderitz. The name Death Island was even used in official reports. See ibid., p. 220.

87 See ibid., p. 224.

university collections in Germany. The Herero-Nama genocide became a prototype for the Nazi's later barbarism—an infallibly developed system of extermination camps organized on the European peripheries, especially in Poland.[88] The Shark Island death camp was finally closed in April 1907, just as Stanisław Wyspiański sent his final version of *The Return of Odysseus* to print.

It is difficult to say to what degree Wyspiański was conscious of the existence of concentration camps in Cuba and the Philippines, or of the mass extermination taking place on Death Island in German-controlled South West Africa. His close ties with the Krakow socialist movement centered on Emil Haecker's magazine *Naprzód*, whose journalists did have knowledge on the subject (through Rosa Luxemburg, if no one else[89]), which allows us at least to entertain the hypothesis that he did. There is one thing, though, that is certain: Wyspiański's antihero has much of the ambiguity of the soldier and refugee in him. On the one hand he is a war criminal, compulsively reenacting a pattern of internalized violence; and on the other a

88 The genocide in German South-West Africa was an important reference point for Hitler, who "became closely associated with a veteran of the conflict. In 1922 he was recruited into an ultra-right-wing militia in Munich that was indirectly under the command of the charismatic General Frany von Epp, who had been a lieutenant during Germany's wars against the Herero and Nama. [...] von Epp was a fervent believer in the Lebensraum theory, and spent his life propagating the notion that the German people needed to expand their territory at the expense of lower races, whether in Africa or Eastern Europe." Ibid., pp. 11–12.

89 German socialist circles opposed colonial practices—considered crimes against native peoples—which they voiced in the unsuccessful campaign for election to the Reichstag in 1907, which, due to the extermination of "women and children in the Kalahari desert" was referred to as the Hottentot election. Later, Rosa Luxemburg wrote on multiple occasions of the British Boer concentration camps and on the camps and extermination carried out by the Germans in Africa. See Rosa Luxemburg, *The Crisis of German Social Democracy (The Junius Pamphlet)* (New York: The Socialist Publication Society, 1919); Rosa Luxemburg, *The Accumulation of Capital: A Contribution to an Economic Explanation of Imperialism*, trans. Agnes Schwarzschild (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1951). See also Rosa Luxemburg, *Theory and Practice*, trans. David Wolff (Chicago: News and Letters, 1980).

creature riddled with fear whose political and social (not ontological) status in his supposed homeland is entirely unclear. Odysseus has forfeited his legal status as a soldier outside of the war zone, and as a civilian who as a survivor, remains nothing more than a body. At the same time, unable to return a victorious master as he repeats the cycle of violence out of fear for his life, Odysseus single-handedly transforms the homestead into a camp and passes on his condition to his son, who in turn accepts it as his own. From this perspective, Ithaca, which transforms from a haven of forced murder to a prison plagued with the memory of death, becomes an exemplar of biopolitics. This is why *The Return of Odysseus* can be read in tandem with Agamben's concept of biopolitics relying on the appropriation of abandonment. The temporary suspension of law under the guise of a "state of exception" also delineates, in Wyspiański's drama, a lasting territorial order in which the continuity, so fundamental to modern identity, between the human being (the biological existence, "bare life," Gk. *zoê*) and the citizen (belonging to a given state and nation, "qualified life," Gk. *bios*) is ruptured.

The perspective adopted here, ascribing the onstage fate of the Polish Odysseus to the restricted space characterized by Agamben as paradigmatic of modernity, is by no means intended to prove that the concept of space developed in the poetic work constitutes a prefiguration of Auschwitz. Instead, Wyspiański's Ithaca ought to be viewed as a specific kind of configuration of the body and the territory, which, in various forms and in various parts of the world, makes itself apparent in the history of modernity and continues to manifest in the present day as a pathological performance of the law[90]—in the form of

90 In the legal production of "pathological territories." Denise Ferreira da Silva analyses the ties between the body and territory in Brazilian favelas. See Denise Ferreira da Silva, "No-bodies: Law, Raciality, and Violence," *Griffith Law Review* no. 2 (2009), pp. 212–36.

concentration camps and extermination camps, but also POW camps and camps for political prisoners, immigrants, and refugees. At play here is an understanding of space in which the state expropriates the Others of their subjectivity through the use of force, and populations not meeting the restrictive criteria of nationality are removed from the area. Perhaps it was through understanding the body/territory relation in such a way that Wyspiański painted his picture of Polishness—defined by the loss of national identity that was a result of the imperialist desires of great kingdoms. Or perhaps it was, as James Clifford would say, his "particular ethnographic position" as an inhabitant of a colonized European nation that enabled him to foresee the possible repetition on the Old Continent (as would happen in the Second World War) of the mass genocide perpetrated at the turn of the 20th century outside of Europe. In the drama's conclusion Wyspiański tries to rescue the subjectivity that had been lost by giving over the story to myth. Among the human remains, Odysseus regains the will of self-determination as the desire to wander and search for himself and his homeland reawakens in him ("There—there! / Ithaca is there! / There! The end and the boundary! / There—my homeland—").[91] However, history rebukes him once again.

The epilogue to Wyspiański's drama is essentially not an epilogue at all. In 1944 Tadeusz Kantor staged *The Return of Odysseus* in a private apartment in Krakow.[92] And so Odysseus once again entered "the depths of history" and became "its tragic actor"[93] as he returned in step with the next war to find

91 See Wyspiański, "Powrót Odysa," p. 285.

92 At first the performance was to take place in a villa on Skawińska street, but because a German officer was quartered there, the play was moved to an apartment at 8 Piłsudskiego street and then at 3 Grabowskiego street.

93 Tadeusz Kantor, "Teatr Niezależny. Eseje teoretyczne," in Tadeusz Kantor *Metamorfozy. Teksty o latach 1934–1974*, *Pisma,* vol. 1, ed. Krzysztof Pleśniarowicz (Wrocław: Ossolineum; Krakow: Cricoteka, , 2005), p. 62.

himself "in an era of unprecedented genocide and in the center of the most severe horror, cut off from the whole world."[94]

Performance Archive

Was it really history, or in fact myth, that stood behind the staging of Wyspiański's drama in occupied Krakow? That this play, put on at the Independent Underground Theatre, of which very little photographic, text, or material documentation managed to survive, was for Tadeusz Kantor the source of all of his later theatre work came to be accepted as a truism. "I constantly come back to *The Return of Odysseus* because that is where it all really started;"[95] while these words, spoken by the artist at an event in 1990, ten months before his death, confirm Kantor's efforts to build a personal mythology on the framework of Wyspiański's drama, are nonetheless enigmatic. Besides referencing Wyspianski's play as a source, the statement implies repetition in the coming back—so characteristic of Kantor's theatre and his "tendency for self-replication."[96] Yet the artist's statement gives no detail. Kantor says nothing about Odysseus himself—about his moral imperative, his ontological and political status, his historical and personal dimension, or his deep-seated ties to the figure that Stanisław Wyspiański had subjected to far-reaching revision. Likewise, little insight is gained from attempting to trace in detail Kantor's direct allusions to the 1944 staging of *The Return of Odysseus* (his third version, in fact[97]), as they

94 Tadeusz Kantor, "W Centre Pompidou i w Stodole," in Kantor *Dalej już nic … Teksty z lat 1985–1990*, *Pisma*, vol. 3, ed. Krzysztof Pleśniarowicz (Wrocław: Ossolineum; Krakow: Cricoteka,, 2005), p. 392.

95 Tadeusz Kantor, "Wolność musi być absolutna …," in *Dalej już nic …*, p. 397.

96 See Krzysztof Pleśniarowicz, "Wyspiański w teatrze Kantora. O dwóch wersjach Powrotu Odysa: z 1988 i 1944 roku," in *Stanisaw Wyspiański. Studium artysty*, ed. Ewa Miodońska-Brookes (Krakow: Universitas, 1996), p. 241.

97 Reconstructing the development of the stage adaptation, Krzysztof Pleśniarowicz identifies three versions of the occupation-era *Return of Odysseus*:

crop up throughout his work: beginning with the relocation of the performance to the Stary Teatr (Old Theatre) in September 1945, to the special fabrication of *Odysseus* set-design models for exhibitions and the reconstruction of the first underground performance space from 1944, the multiple reproduction of the props and set-design elements in other productions (wooden boards, a bow, wagon wheels, a megaphone), the antedating of drawings and text to the "source" version of *The Return of Odysseus*, all the way to a series of stage references to Wyspiański's play in Kantor's 1988 *I Shall Never Return*. It is significant that *The Return of Odysseus*, as a performance created during the war, led Kantor to later develop the idea of "Reality of the Lowest Rank," a stage reality filled with decrepit and marginalized objects, ramshackle spaces like the Odysseus-bombed room. An important part of this ordinary realness in Kantor's theatre was the figure of the Unknown Soldier returning from war, a clear and specific reference to Wyspiański's Odysseus. Nevertheless, in Kantor's recurrent use and expansion of the archive of text and objects from *The Return of Odysseus*, in the confusion of the human body appearing and disappearing, in the eerie dialectic of object and event, archive and body, myth and history, we may search for the very essence of Kantor's Odysseus—the "precedent and prototype" for all subsequent characters in his theatre output.[98]

Though Kantor departed quite radically from Wyspiański's text as he composed his own stage language, rhetorically point-

(1) a constructivist one, on Skawińska Street; (2) a Piłsudskiego Street verson, in which the cannon made at the Staatstheater carpentry workshop first appears; and (3) the one on Grabowskiego Street, where the full realization of the "poor room" came to fruition. See Krzysztof Pleśniarowicz, "Wyspiański w teatrze Kantora," p. 250.

98 See Tadeusz Kantor, "Miejsce teatralne," in Tadeusz Kantor *Teatr Śmierci. Teksty z lat 1975–1984*, *Pisma,* vol. 2, comp. and ed. Krzysztof Pleśniarowicz (Wrocław: Ossolineum; Krakow: Cricoteka, 2004), p. 386.

ing out the dramatism, pathos, and stiltedness of the play,[99] I have no doubt that the dialectic of the figure of Odysseus as a hero of (the history of) modernity—a dialectic created by Wyspiański—is powerfully materialized in the adaptation produced by Kantor. Kantor's Odysseus *is present* in the past as a reaffirmation of the duality of the human condition—as an effect of the course of history, and at the same time a cause. This is why he doesn't make an entrance, but rather sits motionless onstage from the outset, existing only as an "amorphous, misshapen mass (literally). We don't know what 'it' is."[100] And only in the framework of concrete historical experience, like the vicious murders of citizens taking place just outside on the street, could the character of Odysseus take shape in this wartime production. This is well documented in many accounts by spectators of the era,[101] for whom Odysseus evoked civilians shot against a wall, prisoners of war, and also Nazi war criminals, as symbolized by the military overcoat and helmet worn by the Odysseus in Kantor's version. The extreme human objectification thus coexisted with the concept of subjectivity in Kantor's production, which was based on the violence witnessed by the artist himself, just as the private apartment, with its crumbling walls, referenced the military territory that surrounded the home-cum-theatre at 3 Grabowskiego Street.[102]

99 This discrepancy between Wyspiański's Odysseus and Kantor's Odysseus is of a rhetorical nature. It is evident how Kantor, in order to create a distinction, treats the text and dialogue in various ways, in the case of the former, relating only the plot events, and in the case of the latter, the situations onstage. See "POWRÓT ODYSA. Partytura sztuki Stanisława Wyspiańskiego 'Powrót Odysa'. Teatr Podziemny 1944 rok," in Kantor *Metamorfozy*, pp. 87–93.

100 Tadeusz Kantor, "Teatr Niezależny. Eseje teoretyczne," in Kantor, *Metamorfozy*, p. 60.

101 These accounts were recently recalled by Grzegorz Niziołek in *Polski teatr Zagłady* (Warsaw: Instytut Teatralny im. Zbigniewa Raszewskiego, Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej, 2013).

102 Located on Grabowskiego Street was a police station, and, one block away, a mobile army station.

However, it was more than just the immediate surroundings that influenced Tadeusz Brzozowski, the performer playing the role of Odysseus, and the references to war and occupation are too general to have served as the basis for the play. Could there be any significance in the fact that Kantor's adaptation of *The Return of Odysseus* took place no more than 70 kilometers from the Auschwitz-Birkenau extermination camp? The space reconstructed by Kantor for his production in 1944 appeared to spectators to be not a shelter but a trap. The closed room with the battered human body in the center, though not directly referencing the gas chambers, can be read from today's perspective as a manifestation of biopolitics.[103] Thus is it not possible that Kantor, in his temporary laboratory theatre near the end of the war, used the text of Wyspiański, this "maniacal and ingenious poet/decadent,"[104] to study, in the manner of an ethnographer, the experience and effects of European dehumanization on Polish soil? Or perhaps Kantor's production from June/July 1944[105] hit on the very essence of a historical moment—touching less on (or not only on) the issue of mass extermination but (also) anticipating the death march of prisoners still living but utterly exhausted by their confinement in the camps? By August 1944, spurred on by the situation on the eastern front, the Nazis initiated the liquidation of the Auschwitz concentration camp,

103 In this context, taking an interesting form is the difference between Kantor's concept of realism and the theory of realism and naturalism in theatre. In *Miejsce teatralne* we read: "Toller's play *Gas* was performed in a gas chamber [...] This literal tautology, this parallel between the content of the play and the living space, was purely naturalistic, worthy of the practice of K. Stanisławski." Kantor, "Miejsce teatralne," p. 377.

104 This is how he wrote about Stanisław Wyspiański in "Ulisses 1944." See Kantor, "Teatr Niezależny," p. 83.

105 Archivists are unable to determine an exact date of the premiere. What is known is that it took place in June. Kantor himself cites the date of June 21, but it is unclear which version of the play this relates to. The play acquired its final form most likely in late June or early July, and this is the variation that Kantor refers to in his later writing.

evacuating prisoners to the interior of the German Reich and later, near the end of 1944, burning documentation and covering up the evidence.

I wish to put forth the thesis that the Nazi's intentional and meticulous destruction of the archives of the mass genocide perpetrated in Poland was the underlying impetus for what came to be something of an antithesis to those actions—artists' obsessive documentation of their own work, especially works structured as events, actions, happenings, and theatre. It is from such a historical/political perspective, perhaps not even fully recognized and possibly questioned only capriciously by Kantor, that I propose to view the theatre of this artist who, to the end, vehemently defended the idea of the autonomy of art, and whose work to many seemed devoid of political engagement. In 1989, in a text accompanying the play *Today Is My Birthday*, Kantor asserted:

> My life, my fate
> were in unity with my creation.
> Work of art.
> They were fulfilled in my creation.
> They found a solution there.
> My creation was—and still is—my HOME.
> The painting, the performance, the theatre, the stage.[106]

The personal and collective experience are expressed in art and also protected from loss and safely preserved in art—and so too Kantor's work functions as something of an archive of Polish historical experience, which is rooted in the trauma of World War II.

"This [the war] is the beginning of a certain process. Here we must ask how certain psychological and in fact moral compro-

106 Tadeusz Kantor, manuscript stored in Archiwum Cricoteki (Cricoteka Archive), no.: I/000142. http://www.cricoteka.pl/pl/dzis-sa-urodziny-1991-moj-pokoj-c-d/.

mises come about,"[107] stated Mieczysław Porębski, an art historian, who together with Tadeusz Kantor organized Pierwsza Wystawa Sztuki Nowoczesnej (the First Exhibition of Modern Art) in Krakow just after the war, in 1948. The exhibition, which was "an attempt to protect the art world from the tightening noose of the Stalinist authorities' cultural policies,"[108] and which included all of the period's leading artists, functioned as an artistic archive of the war generation. For young artists like Kantor the bygone war persisted not only as a traumatic experience but also as the basis for their search for their own identity.[109]

Tadeusz Kantor, who well understood the words of his friend Mieczysław Porębski, who said that "history writes itself and takes shape in motion," began his process of self-documentation after the conclusion of the war—first in his visual artworks, then in theatre. In 1956 Kantor founded his Cricot 2 company, calling his subsequent plays based on Witkiewicz's avant-garde writing "stages in the journey." Kantor's "journey" was his ouevre of performance works, which were in fact documentation of the development of his ideas on theatre, beginning with his Commedia dell'Arte in Abstracto (*The Cuttlefish*, 1956), through informel theatre (*In a Little Manor House*, 1961), Zero Theatre (*The Madman and the Nun*, 1963), Happenings Theatre (*The Water Hen*, 1967), Impossible Theatre (*Dainty Shapes and Hairy Apes*, 1972) and on to the Theatre of Death (*The Dead Class*, 1975).[110] As he was producing the performance works that archived his theories, he was also building his own

107 See Krystyna Czerni, *Nie tylko o sztuce. Rozmowy z profesorem Mieczysławem Porębskim* (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Dolnośląskie, 1992), p. 90.
108 Piotr Piotrowski, "Polska sztuka między totalitaryzmem a demokracją," in *Warszawa–Moskwa / Moskwa–Warszawa 1900–2000*, exhibition catalogue (Warsaw: Zachęta Narodowa Galeria Sztuki, 2004).
109 See ibid.
110 See Krzysztof Pleśniarowicz, *Teatr Śmierci Tadeusza Kantora* (Chotomów: Verba, 1990), pp. 15–16.

personal archive of objects, scores, manifestos, photos. Kantor often animated archival matter through the reconstruction, multiplication, or exhibition of the collected objects. He kept up the process of self-documentation for the rest of his life. His theatre work in particular acquired an ever-greater archival character as he gradually transformed his self-documentation into a peculiar archive of Polish culture; the subjective unmasked the collective experience, and personal memory reflected shared history. Arising as the fullest expression of this dual transformation—the formulation of a personal language and the construction of an archive of personal creativity—was *Wielopole, Wielopole*, which premiered on June 23, 1980, in Florence, just as the Cricoteka Centre for the Documentation of the Art of Tadeusz Kantor in Krakow was launched as the official institution responsible for collecting documentation on Kantor's work.

Witkiewicz undoubtedly played an important role in Kantor's development as a theatre artist. Initially, Kantor "trained" himself on Witkiewicz's dramas, then continued to seek out his own autonomous theatre language.[111] Ultimately Kantor abandoned Witkiewicz, beginning with *Wielopole, Wielopole* to write his own personal and collective history and create his own performative expression, fulfilling the archival drive that Freud described as both patriarchal and patricidal. The archival drive, according to Derrida, "posited itself to repeat itself and returned to re-posit itself only in the parricide. It amounts to the repressed or suppressed parricide, in the name of the father as dead father."[112] Derrida astutely interprets Freud's thinking when he argues that in essence the ultimate loss of an object makes it possible to find oneself anew as a subject. Perhaps, with such a perspective, we may interpret the idea of Kantor's theatre of death as an effect of the "parricidal impulse as pro-

111 See Niziołek, *Polski teatr Zagłady*.

112 Jacques Derrida, "Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression," in *Diacritics*, vol. 25, no. 2 (summer, 1995), p. 60.

ductive of death in order to ensure remains,"[113] which then enable the survival of identity and the object.

In the psychoanalytic interpretation of the ties between performance and archive, the sacrifice of identity is a means of the archive's survival—or perhaps its renewal. It is therefore no wonder that Odysseus, as a figure embroiled in a patricidal relationship, became for Kantor the foremost figure, whose traces he maniacally sought in all of his later characters: "There were very many of them. A whole procession. In many plays and dramas. In the land of F i c t i o n. They were all 'dead' and they all returned to the world of the living, to our world, to the now."[114] The experience of war—the one witnessed by Kantor as well as the one recorded in Witkiewicz's work—did not so much reveal human nature as it showed the reality of dehumanization, which then informed the characterization of Odysseus as an anthropomorphic remnant. The violence of war animated objects by leaving them deanimated, that is, dead, as it transformed them in hindsight into part of a postwar wasteland: a rotten board, a rusted cord, a muddy wagon wheel, a soldier's uniform. Thus Kantor's interest in anthropology was accompanied by a fascination with material remains as afterimages of the condition of his contemporaries. Fundamental here was his interest in the moment in which the object transforms into matter liberated from a constitutive form—spreading freely, fading away, decaying. And so, when the object turns into an "elementary object"[115] devoid of meaning, physiognomy, and existence as it becomes impersonal, functionless, mutable and fluid matter it is possible, Kantor believed, to return to reflecting on lost identity, on where and how it begins to reemerge, take shape, and affect others. "If an object disappears, loses its

113 Rebecca Schneider, *Performing Remains. Art and War in Times of Theatrical Reenactment* (London: Routledge, 2011), p. 103

114 Kantor, "Miejsce teatralne," p. 386.

115 Tadeusz Kantor, "Zanikanie przedmiotu," in Kantor *Metamorfozy*, p. 324.

objectivity, there emerges the notion of identity, and not variety of form."[116]

The dialectic of the disappearance and appearance of the subject and object is, I believe, at the center of the body-archive concept unfolding in Kantor's work. In his performance practice, which conveys the ambiguity of the boundary between animate and inanimate matter, Kantors treats the body as a specific archive of history as well as of individual and collective memory. Essential to his idea of the body-archive are "miserable remnants and pitiful traces" of matter undergoing "disintegration, decay, putrefaction, and rot,"[117] which constitute the foundations of anthropology. On the other hand these very "forgotten remains, embarrassing scraps" are transformed by way of the artist's symbolic actions into symptoms of "the human instinct for preservation and memory!"[118] This idea of self-archiving manifested itself with particular strength in Kantor's emballages, which involved wrapping, covering, veiling, and packing the body in the matter. More than just a manifestation of the concept of the archive in Kantor's output, the emballages were driven by an imperative to package the human body, an obsession with concealing and covering objective matter: "I hit upon an extraordinary model: wanderers, crusaders outside of society, on a constant journey, aimless and homeless, shaped by their madness and passion for packaging their bodies."[119]

It seems that for Kantor himself this necessity was connected with the figure of Odysseus as a man deprived of roots and identity by traumatic historical experience. The Odysseus from the wartime play, this clump of mud, a shapeless mass, later returned as a "Something," which we discover in the artist's 1961 poem entitled "Something," from 1961, and in the 1963

116 Ibid.
117 Tadeusz Kantor, "Litania sztuki informel," in Kantor, *Metamorfozy*, pp. 178–79.
118 Tadeusz Kantor, "Lekcja anatomii wedle Rembrandta," in Kantor, *Metamorfozy*, p. 358.
119 Tadeusz Kantor, "Ubranie – ambalaż," in Kantor, *Metamorfozy*, p. 315.

drawing *Quelque Chose*. The drawing, for a stage adaptation of Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz's *The Madman and the Nun*—arising out of Kantor's deliberations on Albrecht Dürer's 1515 *Rhinoceros* woodcut[120]—depicts a wanderer, or rather a hobo, who, taking after nature's strangest creature, which Kantor believed to be the rhinoceros, resembles a monster laden with layers and layers of matter. Here the human body is hidden beneath, or perhaps crushed by, a heap of coats, sheets, hats, shawls, and bags of various kinds, "larger, smaller, stuffed, hanging from ropes and straps." Protruding near one of the legs of this black "shining, greasy mass" is a glaring detail: "a round projectile with a pointed tip, from the era of World War I."[121] Thus this figure bears the bodily stigma of a Great War soldier's mutilation, which, despite being concealed under layers of matter, still reveals itself to be the remains of a person who has experienced history. Kantor infused his theatre characters with this notion of the human wanderer, a soldier; his characters were wandering corpses, his plays were journeys, and in effect he himself as an artist was a soldier of the avant-garde.

The act of connecting the idea of the modern artist's endless journey with the experience of war and violence (including symbolic violence) in the figure of Odysseus was noticed years later by the contemporary theatre and visual artist Jerzy Grzegorzewski, who grasped, as few others had, the archival dimension of Kantor's theatre. In his 2005 play *On: Drugi Powrót Odysa* (He: The Second Return of Odysseus), produced just prior to his death, Grzegorzewski set the stage for a dialogue with Kantor's wartime performance of *The Return of Odysseus* while also using the setting of a burning city and apartment, portrayed as a "claustrophobic territory of survival,"[122] to introduce his

120 See Tadeusz Kantor, "Spotkanie z Nosorożcem Dürera (1962)," in Kantor, *Metamorfozy*, p. 296.

121 Tadeusz Kantor, "'Coś," in Kantor, *Metamorfozy*, p. 297.

122 Antonina Grzegorzewska, "Jeden bohomaz mniej, jeden więcej," in [Jerzy Grzegorzewski] *On. Drugi Powrót Odysa*, *Scenariusze*, vol. 2 (Warsaw: Instytut

own history as a child of the war, a citizen of Łódź, an heir to the classical avant-garde legacy, a successor to Tadeusz Kantor and Stanisław Wyspiański.[123] In *The Second Return of Odysseus* Grzegorzewski revealed his disillusionment and defeat, which lay at the roots of his depression and alcoholism, as well as his artistic failure, which ultimately led to his inability to finish the play on his own. "Titling the play *The Second Return of Odysseus*, the artist marks the endeavor with a verdict of bankruptcy," asserts his daughter, Antonina Grzegorzewska, who completed the text for her father. While she ultimately rescued the project (which played 19 times after the premiere), Antonina Grzegorzewska's final version of the play included radically new material and effectively eliminated several threads from the original draft that were highly significant from a historical point of view. One of these threads is the connection between the concept of Odysseus and the figure of the artist and soldier.

Grzegorzewski's original conception counterpointed Odysseus with a stage alter ego, his mirror image, or perhaps one possible iteration of his existence, in the character of Władysław S., also identified in several drafts as Vladzio or Paul Dedalus St.[124] In this figure, a "cripple missing a foot, a hand, and an eye"[125] and spewing avant-garde manifestos, it is easy to detect the painter Władysław Strzemiński, Grzegorzewski's mentor in his early years in Łódź and an artist whose influence on Kantor remains insufficiently studied and recognized.[126] Most influen-

Teatralny im. Zbigniewa Raszewskiego, 2013), p. 13.

123 Jerzy Grzegorzewski, as the artistic director of Teatr Narodowy (the National Theatre) in Warsaw, 1997–2003, proposed to fulfill the idea of "national theatre" by performing Wyspiański's dramas. He also called Teatr Narodowy under his direction the "House of Wyspiański."

124 After Antonina Grzegorzewska's text was incorporated into the performance, Grzegorzewski removed the character of Strzemiński entirely and, in the final version, replaced him with He, played by Jerzy Radziwiłowicz.

125 [Grzegorzewski], *On. Drugi Powrót Odysa*, p. 127.

126 The one person to reflect on the connections between Kantor's and Strzemiński's work is Andrzej Turowski. See Andrzej Turowski, "Oślepiające powidoki," in *Didaskalia* nos. 103–04 (2011), pp. 54–57. The subject was also

tial was Strzemiński's "theory of vision,"[127] which, as Andrzej Turowski explains, is based on "the eye and body's subjective-objective unity in the realm of homogenous matter."[128] It was a theoretical summary of Strzemiński's artistic practice and aesthetic reflection on the relationship between the evolution of society, historical experience, and the human body's means of perception. Though Kantor openly opposed Strzemiński's theory of vision, he did also acknowledge the painter as "an exceptional figure in our painting history, due to his uncompromising, extraordinary steadfastness and radicalism. [...] One must be extremely brave," Kantor wrote in a recounting of the painter's life, "to arrive in one's artistic work, capricious and unpredictable, through all of the circles of devilish logic, at a final and ultimate opinion, however absurd it may seem."[129]

In studying the subtle interdependencies of Strzemiński's and Kantor's work, Turowski identifies both artists as "creators of afterimages that annihilate pictures" who share "a common need to define the pertinence of the world through the physiology and metaphysics of vision."[130] Without a doubt, in the case of both artists, the conception of an afterimage as a "dark frame of death" was strongly rooted in attempts to work through the trauma of World War II and in particular the Holocaust. This issue became fundamental not only to Kantor's theatre of death, as Grzegorz Niziołek convincingly argues, but to all of Kantor's theatre work, starting with the wartime production of *The Return of Odysseus*. Meanwhile, for Strzemiński, a direct expression of these experiences came in a series of collages titled *Moim*

taken up by Turowski during the scholarly conference *Tadeusz Kantor. Zderzenie*, which took place on March 22, 2015 at the Small Stage of Teatr Powszechny in Łódź as part of the XXI International Festival of Plays Pleasant and Unpleasant.

127 See Władysław Strzemiński, *Teoria widzenia*, ed. Iwona Luba (Łódź: Muzeum Sztuki w Łodzi, 2016).

128 Turowski, "Oślepiające powidoki," p. 54.

129 Tadeusz Kantor, "O Władysławie Strzemińskim," in Kantor *Dalej już nic*, p. 374.

130 Turowski, "Oślepiające powidoki", p. 57.

przyjaciołom Żydom (To My Friends, the Jews, 1945–47), composed of his own wartime drawings transferred with carbon paper together with clippings of press photographs documenting the tragedy of the ghettos and camps. Turowski:

> Strzemiński based his postwar series of collages entirely on afterimages. He collided the "memory of his own images" with social memory recorded in circulated material (photographs). The double borrowing constitutes his archive of the Holocaust, forcing the traces and fragments found therein to come together in the shared space of a collage.[131]

Though Turowski bases his wholly accurate observations on Benjamin's concept of collage and Warburg's idea of the atlas, he does not mention that, for Strzemiński, the "memory of his own images" related as much to his radically corporeal experience of the First World War, during which he lost a hand, a foot, and an eye in a grenade explosion while serving as an officer in a tsarist army minesweeping unit, as to his witnessing of the Second World War.

The indelible presence of the "avant-garde soldier's" maimed body was brilliantly analyzed by Stach Szabłowski, who wrote that Strzemiński entered the postwar art world as

> a man anatomically reduced by nearly half, an asymmetrical and uneven man. [...] And in that "uneven" condition, he drove the radical avant-garde movement in interwar Poland as a theoretician and practitioner. It can be said that the history of Polish avant-garde art stands on one leg—on Strzemiński's one leg that survived the war.[132]

Szabłowski discusses a 1985 canvas by Jarosław Modzelewski titled *Strzemiński opłakujący Malewicza* (Strzemiński Mourning

131 Ibid., p. 55.
132 Stach Szabłowski, "Bóle fantomowe," in ed. Joanna Pawlik, *Balans* (Krakow: Bunkier Sztuki, 2010), p. 39.

Malewicz), in which, against an abstract landscape, Strzemiński, clad in sports attire, stands over Malewicz's body, lying on the floor in clothing reminiscent of that worn by the figures in Andrzej Wróblewski's *Rozstrzelania* (Executions, 1949), a series of paintings documenting the violence done by Germans during Hitler's occupation of Poland. Trying to balance on his one leg, and covering his face in despair with his right hand and the prosthesis on his left arm, the maimed artist performs a peculiar grieving ritual over the dead avant-garde icon. Szabłowski boldly formulates the idea that the figure of the one-handed, one-legged, one-eyed father of the Polish avant-garde left a mark on the most radical incarnation of contemporary critical art, the work of Katarzyna Kozyra and Artur Żmijewski. The mention of Żmijewski's *An Eye for an Eye* (1998), comprising a video and series of photographs depicting bodies with amputated limbs linked in various choreographic configurations with intact bodies, forces us to ask a risky question: is it not possible that in these pictures openly addressing the status of the handicapped in modern society there also lurks the World War I trauma that has never been fully expressed in Polish visual art?

Taking into consideration the interdependence of the art of Strzemiński and Kantor, as well as adopting a slightly different perspective on the connections between Kantor and Witkiewicz, reveals, in my opinion, the dialectic of the experience of the First and Second World Wars that is present but underrepresented in Polish cultural history, and especially its influence on Kantor's theatre and how it is received. Wyspiański's *The Return of Odysseus,* in its numerous and not always obvious onstage materializations by the father of the Theatre of Death, thus takes on a strategic role. Kantor's iterations of Odysseus underscore the fact that the experience of World War I—preserved both in visual documentation and in the bodily memory of the artist-soldier—has taken on the form of an artistic archive addressing the innumerable traumas of World War II and, most importantly, processing the experience of the Holocaust.

Fig. 28: A film still from Artur Żmijewski's video *Oko za Oko* (Eye for Eye), 1998.

Kantor's *Return of Odysseus*, understood—even by Kantor himself, I believe—as a theatrical document of an event, thus acquires the status of a double historical account. The war, as a veritable context for this production , was not only a means for the actualization of Wyspiański's drama. As Grzegorz Niziołek convincingly argues in his *Polski teatr Zagłady* (The Polish Theatre of the Holocaust), Kantor's *The Return of Odysseus* can be interpreted as a crucial performance for understanding his experience as a witness of the Holocaust,[133] and that of the per-

133 Grzegorz Niziołek, who was the first to interpret Kantor's theatre from the perspective of testimony, suggests that even though there is little information on

Fig. 29: A film still from Artur Żmijewski's video *Oko za Oko* (Eye for Eye), 1998.

formance's spectator as a witness to a violent event repeated in the theatrical frame.

This (controversial) analogous position of the witness and spectator was brilliantly discussed by Niziołek, who points out that Kantor's *Return of Odysseus* opening scene, in which an oblivious "something" suddenly becomes a person with a human face, serves to shock the passive observer into becoming

whether Kantor directly witnessed the Holocaust, we can nonetheless surmise that, having lived in 1942 on Węgierska street in Krakow, which had been part of the ghetto until shortly before, Kantor must have been in close proximity to such events as the round ups of ghetto inhabitants for transport to extermination camps and street executions. See Niziołek, *Polski teatr Zagłady*, p. 375.

a spectator complicit in the death of another human.[134] Simultaneously evoking fear and aggression, in this moment of the spectator's recognition, "I'm witnessing a violent event," Niziołek argues. It is the source of a series of misunderstandings in the debate about Kantor's production. At play here is the identification of Odysseus as a Wehrmacht soldier returning from Stalingrad, and the symbolic preservation of that character as an important figure in the Polish historical-cultural narrative. Niziołek corrects this interpretation of the character as a soldier from the unified Nazi forces by pointing out a particular stage prop—a Polish army helmet from 1939 instead of a Wehrmacht helmet! Indicating this meaningful visual mistake, which was noted by one of the first spectators, Mieczysław Porębski,[135] and then repeated as a fact in Polish theatre history through generations, Niziołek is able to show that this misunderstanding was essentially a symptom (later reproduced) of the Poles' repression of having been passive witnesses of, and therefore jointly responsible for, the crimes committed during the war, including the Holocaust.

Niziołek calls this erroneous interpretation of Kantor's play "an important lead in defining the figure of repressed testimony,"[136] which he determines to be fundamental to the position of the postwar Polish theatre spectator. By noticing the seemingly trivial stage detail—the helmet, the prop—we see how strong the mechanisms of transference are in the theatre space and how easily (and dangerously) that space can change into a phantasmatic space. Niziołek's focus on examining the spectator's psychology and the communal nature of the theatre experience, especially here in relation to the context of Holocaust testimony that was coming to light during the period when Kantor was presenting his *Odysseus*, also diverts the spectator's

134 Ibid., p. 120.
135 See ibid., p. 122.
136 Ibid.

attention from issues that, while admittedly noted, are not fully articulated. Also in line with Grzegorz Niziołek's conception of the theatre as not so much a medium for the representation of repressed events, but rather the site of the very act of repression being repeated, is the identification of the character Odysseus with Tadeusz Kantor's father. As Niziołek suggests, the father's return to the stage was a "menacing paternal figure" in whom the spectator could see the German war criminal, it was also the "specter of Odysseus connoting the specter of the father"[137] himself, murdered in Auschwitz in 1942—who then blatantly returns in *I Shall Never Return* (1988). My aim is to identify in Kantor's Odysseus the Great War figure who is repressed from the Polish historical-cultural narrative, the same figure of the World War I soldier who is archived and theatrically articulated in *Wielopole, Wielopole*, produced 35 years after World War II. In this performance the artist's father, Marian Kantor, a soldier in the 2nd Brigade of the Polish Legions, appears among a group of other legionnaires crammed into a corner of a room—a theatrical representation of Tadeusz Kantor's childhood room.

The childhood space is the twelve-square-meter room, located in a rectory in Wielopole, where Helena Kantor (with daughter Zofia and pregnant with Tadeusz) moved to just after the outbreak of the war and her husband's enlistment. She stayed there until 1921. Thus the years 1914 to 1921 represent not only the period in which the childhood room recalled onstage was a part of the Kantors's life, but also the duration of Marian Kantor's service in the army, as well as the timeframe of the war as preserved in Polish collective memory. We must remember that the years 1914 to 1918 were merely the first stage of the war, the period of liberation, in which 1918 remains as the only significant date. This was also the time leading up to the "actual war" that unfolded from 1919 to 1921 between the newly reborn Poland and Soviet Russia, in which it was no

137 Ibid., p. 127.

longer independence at stake but the future political shape of independent Poland. Marian Kantor fought in both World War I and the Polish-Soviet War from 1919 to the end of his military career in 1921. Though between 1916 and 1917 he visited the rectory in Wielopole on three occasions while on furlough, in the childhood room presented onstage in *Wielopole, Wielopole*, he never returned to his wife and children after the war's conclusion.[138]

In the copious bibliographies on Tadeusz Kantor's work there has never been an attempt to address the issue of the memory of World War I as a distinct and perhaps key element in his theatre work. That being said, the recurrence of the year 1914 in his performances has been amply noted. Especially in regard to his play *The Dead Class*, there is a tendency in the critical analysis of many to universalize the experience of death, the category of individual memory, and the artist's identity. Also important is the fact that cultural memory of the Second World War overshadowed Polish war memories from the period 1914 to 1918. With its millions of civilian casualties, World War II overshadows the picture of the bloody and often equally fratricidal violence of World War I experienced by Polish soldiers in the armies of the three partitioning countries. This process of depriving Great War soldiers of a theatrical representation of their own experience,[139] of ignoring their fate in the face of the fate of the civilian victims of World War II, and above all the

138 See Klaudiusz Święcicki's detailed study of Marian Kantor's involvement in both wars: Klaudiusz Święcicki, *Historia w teatrze Tadeusza Kantora* (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, 2007), pp. 291–92. See also Zdzisław Kantor, *Marian Kantor-Mirski* (Krakow–Tychy: Teatr Mały Tychy/Cricoteka, 2004).

139 A true exception is Jerzy Jarocki's 1978 play *Dream of the Sinless Woman*, largely based on personal documents, family keepsakes, and private archives. Though the subject is still underrepresented, the play was a significant move toward coming to grips with the Polish tradition of silence on the Great War and its most touchy aspects, such as fratricide. Rather perversely, the play was developed for the sixtieth anniversary of Poland regaining statehood, at the Stary Theater in Krakow.

arguably unjustified gesture of affiliating Polish people with the fate of the Jews, is well illustrated in a section of Krzysztof Pleśniarowicz's analysis concerning the conception and function of historical time in *The Dead Class*. In his *The Theatre of Death of Tadeusz Kantor* we read:

> The historical time of the photographic plate of dead memory is made present by only two facts: the assassination of Archduke Ferdinand in Sarajevo and the Kaiser's mobilization proclamation. These tidings of war are read from an old newspaper by the Cleaning Women, after which the "live" Beadle sings a fragment of the Austro-Hungarian national anthem. The First World War Soldier, with his unending bayonet charge, soon joins the procession of pupils around the school benches. Could it be that the historical fate of the resurrected students is death for the Kaiser and our country? Yet, in *The Dead Class* there arises another system of references, which Konstanty Puzyna defines as a kind of homage to the dead world, to the lost community of Central European Jewry, whose fate less than thirty years after Sarajevo would be the Holocaust. The year 1914 in the dead newspaper thus foreshadows the years 1939 to 1945, reminding us of the end of staid, cordial Europe, whose symbol was Franz Joseph I, and an announcement of the time when the 20th-century Golgotha was fulfilled.[140]

The Cleaning Woman (Death) snatches the newspaper from the Beadle's hand and proceeds to "open it and flip through the pages. [...] She slides it under the light. She begins to read, squints her eyes, sounds out syllables, grunts ...." The 1914 newspaper makes a return appearance in Kantor's final play, *Today Is My Birthday* (1990). Here a 1914 newspaper man hands out copies of a special edition announcing the outbreak of war ("The latest news straight from the Bosnian capital," "The latest information, Germany's sensational mobilization," "Kaiser Willy threatens war at any moment"). However, at the heart of

140 Pleśniarowicz, *Teatr Śmierci Tadeusza Kantora*, p. 49.

Krzysztof Pleśniarowicz's analysis are not the specifics of history as recorded on the newspaper's pages—for instance, the fact that 1914 was the year Kantor's father, an ardent patriot and Catholic, was deployed; nor the material status of the stage prop in question—the newspaper used in *The Dead Class* was actually a copy of the then current *Trybuna Ludu* or *Gazeta Krakowska* pasted onto a canvas backing.[141] The lengthy quote from Pleśniarowicz's book, however, does effectively reflect the general interpretation of the year 1914 in Polish art and theatre, in which historical documentation of the Great War functions as little more than a metaphor for bygone times, referencing the mythical "multicultural" nature of "old Poland"; or for the future, as it heralds the year 1939 as the tragic end of the golden years of Poland's newly regained independence.

These peculiar manipulations of time surely had cultural consequences: since time ceases to be understood in a concrete and literal way, the categories of accountability, blame, and punishment also become blurred, as do the identities of the perpetrator and the victim. Likewise, through the mythologization of history, Poles acquire the chance for collective national redemption on the backs of Jewish Holocaust victims. It was an opportunity that also worked retroactively, redeeming them for the "sins" of World War I. And in this way, as Roland Barthes would say, myth takes hold of the sign, stripping history of its casual and material dimensions. Subjected to the process of mythologization, history allows for significant shifts to take place: it allows personal offenses to be delegated to someone else and/or makes it possible to appropriate Otherness.

The process whereby the World War II myth took hold of and grew from the tales of World War I also applies in a specific way to the historical narrative prevailing in Polish theatre studies on *Wielopole, Wielopole*. Contrary to this narrative, I propose to treat this play as a particular and absolutely personal update of

141 This information was provided to me by Lech Stangret.

The Return of Odysseus. Repeated here is the dialectic of site—a private apartment that is also a military zone; the dialectic of the historical time of the collective and the subjective time of the individual; and finally the dialectic of the figure of Odysseus the soldier himself. In *Odysseus* Kantor channels his own childhood and turns a unit of World War I soldiers, the Recruits, gathered in a corner of his private room chosen as the performance setting, into equal stage protagonists. Two years earlier, in his notes preceding the development of the play, Kantor writes about the soldiers and about the places they ended up:

> Somewhere in the corner of the room, behind a wardrobe, a group of INDIVIDUALS OF A FOREIGN KIND have nested, in that child's room existing only in memory … they perform drills, marches and maneuvers … Perhaps this shabby room will become a territory of war events and a battlefield …[142]

These words suggest that it was not simply a child's room that becomes the subject of the play but rather a room understood as a *pars pro toto* of war.

Tellingly, the collective body of recruits crammed onto the stage has its origins in a photograph that is at once a historical document and a Kantor family keepsake. In a way, the photo of the recruits that is at the core of *Wielopole, Wielopole*, sent back by Kantor's father from the front, encapsulates the entire structure of the piece, embodying as it does the theatre of death in the dual sense of Barthesian *punctum* and a representation of those who—being eternally dead—can always come back to life through and continually set in motion the performance of memory. Denis Bablet writes about the recruit photo, saying that while it served as "a source of inspiration for *Wielopole, Wielopole*, it does not appear anywhere in the play; Kantor keeps

142 Tadeusz Kantor, "Wojsko. Le Soldat – L'Individu Militaire," in Kantor *Wielopole, Wielopole* (Krakow–Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1984), p. 22.

it close to his vest, in his closet of privacy."[143] Indeed, it does not exist as a material object, or as a stage prop, like the family photo in *Today Is My Birthday*. Yet that very tangible, real photograph, inscribed on the back with the date September 12, 1914, and showing Kantor's father, Marian, seated in the left corner, is present in the performance, even dictating its structure.

Really the only material that showcases (or, perhaps, preserves) this archival dimension of Kantor's *Wielopole, Wielopole* is Andrzej Sapija's film recording of the play. Among the several recordings of *Wielopole, Wielopole* in existence, Sapija's has a very specific perspective—it was produced not as a potentially "objective" recording of the play (like the classic one by Stanisław Zajączkowski)[144] but as an auteur film. It thus constitutes a distinct work of art, an artistic rendering of not only a past performance but above all of that one-off, unrepeated event taking place in a Wielopole Skrzyńskie church, to which Kantor returned after a prolonged absence in 1983.[145] In his film, Sapija also incorporates other documentation, expanding *Wielopole, Wielopole's* source pool with a clip from a documentary film from the archives of Wytwórnia Filmów Dokumentalnych Fabularnych (the Documentary and Feature Film Studios) in Warsaw depicting soldiers marching along to the

143 Denis Bablet, "Tadeusz Kantor i fotografia," in *Fotografie Jacquie Bablet*, trans. Janusz Jarecki, eds. Anna Halczak and Ewa Ryżewska (Krakow: Cricoteka, 2009), p. 26.

144 Stanisław Zajączkowski, dir., WIELOPOLE, WIELOPOLE, (Telewizja Polska, 1984).

145 Actually, Sapija's film was based on recordings of two performances of *Wielopole, Wielopole*—the one in the Wielopole Skrzyńskie church and the one performed in Hala Sokoła specifically for the purpose of a television recording (1983). The film thus combines versions that are different in terms of the space, context, and audience, and consequently the energy. This was nevertheless not an artistic decision but rather, as related to me by the director, was necessitated by technical difficulties arising during the recording in Wielopole, where a break in the recording was caused by a delay in providing the cameraman with a second reel of film. (The details concerning the film came to light in my interview with Andrzej Sapija on March 20, 2012.)

song "Piechota ta szara piechota," which Kantor had incorporated into his play. Sapija also includes the aforementioned photo of recruits, photographs of Wielopole landscapes and old local cemeteries, reminiscent of the World War I-era Galician Jewish cemeteries nearby; later he uses the family photos Kantor used to develop the characters; and finally the artist's notes from rehearsals, which comment on and sometimes explain the characters, their behavior, and the meaning of the onstage scene. All of these materials edited into the film constitute an accompanying narrative that runs parallel to the one onstage. Additionally, as asserted by Andrzej Sapija, the photos used in the film, especially the photo with Kantor's mother, Helena, standing in the middle—used in a documentary on *The Return of Odysseus*—and a picture of his father, Marian, sitting at a table with Kantor's uncle Stanisław Berger, influenced the shape and structure of Kantor's final play. The artist, seeing onscreen that real photo, which he knew so well from the family archive, decided to animate it in *Today Is My Birthday*. In this way the very method of documenting one play became an inspiration for Kantor's further ruminations on the notion of "photographic plates of memory":

> Memory is like a card catalogue with photographic plates. We never recall an action as it is necessary to possess a special mental constitution to imagine action. However, when I recall something it is a static image, yet an image that has a kind of motion: it fades and reappears. I called it "pulsing," a pulsing of a frame that I then follow with a method of repetition. It is the repetition of the same movement, the same situation to the point that it dissipates in space.[146]

It is worth reiterating that the notion of the "photographic memory plate," one of the key philosophical categories in

146 "O fotografii z Tadeuszem Kantorem," interview with Tadeusz Kantor by Andrzej Matynia, in *Projekt* no. 3 (1987), p. 17.

Kantor's theatre, was born out of extensive experimentation with photographic documentation of his activities, and out of attempts to incorporate photographs and the camera as integral parts of his performances. The camera appearing in the first scene of *Wielopole, Wielopole*—much like in *The Dead Class*, where in the "Historical Daguerreotype" scene "everyone spontaneously gathers around for a group photo"—signals a manipulation of time and exposes a certain way, as Andrzej Wełmiński once perceptively put it, of "creeping up on its mechanisms from behind."[147]

Above all, however, the idea of the "photographic memory plate" is the conceptual basis for *Wielopole, Wielopole* as a very particular performance. Kantor explains:

> We cannot expect a "play" or a performative rendition of one. From the initial work, it seems that it will be rather a trial. An attempt to invoke a time that has passed and the people who inhabited it (and have also passed). And, like any test, it will be governed by the "unknown," by only intentions and dreams, which by nature are always incomplete and not subject to rational requirements. Thus, this will not be a presentation of well-known events or familiar characters, whose roles are faithful and precisely "recorded" in family chronicles—(of little importance and private)—or in history textbooks. This will not be a refined "performance" but rather a "TRYING ON" of the characters, roles, and events.[148]

In the ontological sense *Wielopole, Wielopole* was thus never a play—that is, a representation of something that had autonomously existed beforehand—but a performance, or rather a necroperformance, which, from the perspective of post-mortal

147 Andrzej Wełmiński, "Między Umarłą klasą a Wielopolem, Wielopolem," in *Teatr Pamięci Tadeusza Kantora. Wypisy z przeszłości*, eds. Józef Chrobak and Marek Wilk (Dębica: Muzeum Regionalne, 2008), p. 28.
148 Tadeusz Kantor, "Wielopole, Wielopole. Partytura teatralna," in Kantor *Wielopole, Wielopole*, p. 34.

life as discussed here, suits the nature of Kantor's work quite well. As intended by its creator, *Wielopole, Wielopole* was always meant to be nothing more than an assertion of the virtual presence of the (dead) body in seemingly defined spatial and temporal conditions, though conditions that are dynamically in flux as a result of the functioning of memory as an archive. The notion of "photographic memory plates" interpreted this way brings out two seemingly contradictory aspects of the history studied by Kantor in *Wielopole, Wielopole*: its archival dimension preserving and perpetuating events, and its performative dimension, fading and dissipating in time and space. As I have tried to show, the incongruity of these two aspects is nothing more than a cultural myth arising from the logic of the traditional understanding of the archive as a depot of enduring matter and of lasting meanings and values. This logic, it must be added, is one that disqualifies other means of cognition, other methods of remembering, which in turn are available in performative practices that render the body, constantly threatened by perishability (death), an archive of history as well as of individual and collective memory. Seen as a necroperformance, *Wielopole, Wielopole* also invites us to rethink the place of history in the framework of ritual repetition—reenacting history as "a set of sedimented acts that are not the historical acts themselves but the act of securing any incident backward—the repeated act of securing memory."[149]

Transpiring in *Wielopole, Wielopole* is a condensation of historical and subjective time, of collective and individual memory, via a necroperformance of the Great War soldier. For Kantor, born in 1915 and a child of the Great War, as he reminisces on his childhood the military becomes synonymous with the memory of the defragmented, hybrid body. Formulating the thesis that our memory is stored in a "poor place," in "some corner," or "behind a door"—in "the back and peripheries of the

149 Schneider, *Performing Remains*, p. 104.

room,"[150]—and at the same time placing soldiers in just such places on the stage, Kantor shows the fundamental strangeness of the past and the strength of the gradual appropriation of the present by the memory that resides in that strangeness. The military is thus presented as a collective body, "A mass, whether mechanical or animate, of hundreds of identical heads, hundreds of the same legs and hundreds of the same arms"; as a gigantic disciplined human machine: "In rows and files, set regularly and diagonally, heads, legs, arms, shoulders, boots, buttons, eyes, noses, mouths, guns. Identical movements performed by hundreds of identical individuals, hundreds of organs of that monstrous punishing geometry."[151] Soldiers, being radically different, function in the performance always as a uniform group, a homogenous mechanism/organism reduced to "ground zero"—to the sphere of instinct, animality, of primality tightly concealed beneath a culturally constructed uniform. This aspect is illustrated by the performance's most brutal scenes, like the one in which Polish soldiers (the majority of whom happen to be played by Italian performers[152]), at the words "for our Poland they go to war" (from the song "Piechota ta szara piechota," heard from offstage), transform into an execution squad that kills the Little Rabbi with a hail of bullets. Kantor takes yet another approach to coming to grips with the legend of legion soldiers fighting for independence in the scene where legionnaires gang-rape Mother Helka: "Suddenly, everything becomes simple, one becomes equalized and 'subordinate' and the whole calcified shell of culture crumbles … the language that arises is ostentatiously crass, obscene, brutal and cynical …"[153]

150 Kantor, "Wielopole, Wielopole. Partytura teatralna," p. 33.
151 Kantor, "Wojsko. Le Soldat – L'Individu Militaire," p. 20.
152 Since the premiere of *Wielopole, Wielopole* took place in Florence, the performers playing the group of soldiers were cast in Italy.
153 Ibid., p. 21.

In the general manifestation of the dehumanized human subspecies that is the military, what comes to the fore above all is Kantor's sense of otherness in relation to his soldier father. Marian Kantor—who set off for the front on July 29, 1914, never to permanently return to his wife—attains the rank of a figure reduced to a uniform, one that is bestial, brutal, and contrasting drastically with civilians, Tadeusz Kantor included. It is as if he returns to the stage in *Wielopole, Wielopole* only to "take final leave of the house which he had grown to despise, hurling barracks profanities."[154] This otherness is further underscored by the father's ambiguous status within the framework of the performance, since, as Kantor suggests, he is merely some "suspicious character [who] dresses up as a recruit to pretend to be my father."[155] In this, Kantor alludes to the unexpected correlations between the body of the soldier and the body of the actor, the similarity of the mechanisms for internalizing the discourse of history and politics in bodies that are much more radically habituated than those of ordinary spectators/civilians. For this reason, in *Wielopole, Wielopole* he continues to search for situations in which "the condition of the MILITARY forms parallels with the condition of the ACTOR," in which soldiers marching into the past, dead, "reduced to a single grimace and a single moment," could become the model for his actors/performers, understood as liminal beings existing in a state between life and death. The relation with the spectator is thus only one side of Kantor's actor; the other side of his existence is to be a soldier, and consequently one who is degraded to "an external shell, an object, a CORPSE."[156] Seen from the perspective of double otherness—that of being a soldier and being an actor—the father pacing the childhood room is the most ghostly character in the

154 Notes from *Wielopole, Wielopole* rehearsals. Rehearsal entries marked "28/2 – 14/3," typed manuscript, Galeria Foksal Archive.
155 Kantor, "Wielopole, Wielopole. Partytura teatralna," p. 33.
156 Kantor, "Wojsko. Le Soldat – L'Individu Militaire," p. 21.

entire performance. In fact he is really just a *trace* of a character, as Kantor calls him in his poem "Quiet Night," which recalls his father's three visits home while on leave:

A trace of him
My line of sight was low
So:
Just boots
Up to the knees
Keen ears catch
Father's unintelligible
Cursing
And odd footsteps
One two, one two ...
Then I learned the word:
March.[157]

On the one hand, as a soldier and an actor, the father demonstrates the Polish Legions' political dependence on the Austrian army as he marches around the stage in Austrian parade style; while on the other he is the most insubordinate component of the collective body—he often breaks cadence and falls out of rhythm from the organic mass of soldiers. He deviates from the structured rhythm of the machine like a broken part, a malfunctioning cog. Ultimately, the figure of the father embodies the play's conception of psychological time as connected to individual, emotional-bodily memory, which—as it will turn out—works in the complete opposite direction from that of the historical narrative that represses the First World War through the experience of World War II.

The appearance of Marian Kantor here is different than in *The Return of Odysseus*—as a dead legionnaire and not as a victim of Auschwitz. In this somewhat premature death of the

157 Kantor, "Cicha noc," in *Teatr* no. 12 (1991), p. 22.

father, we can identify a gesture that is quite characteristic of Kantor, in which he places the status of "deceased" on all of the figures in his theatre of death. The other characters in *Wielopole, Wielopole* are no exception, as they also take part in a memory ritual rooted in the invocation of the dead. It is no less important that the gesture may also be seen as an act of killing the father, carried out in the symbolic realm by an as yet unborn son. What does it mean then if we imagine that the hero of *Wielopole, Wielopole* is the unborn son? What, then, if we see in the figure of the returning dead soldier father a stage reflection—a sort of mirror-image—of the unborn son. Such an interpretation is even hinted at by Kantor himself when he beckons us to discern ourselves in the strange and uncanny matter that is the army: "It is us! But STRANGE! As if we were looking at ourselves for the first time, but from 'the side,' meaning dead. That is why the (marching) ARMY attracts us so strongly. Its strict and implacable-as-death condition reveals a picture of us ourselves."[158]

In his book *Male Fantasies*, Klaus Theweleit analyzes the concept of the man-soldier ("der soldatische Mann") on the basis of an in-depth study of hundreds of journals, memoirs, and stories written by World War I German soldiers during the war and in the 1920s. In examining that literature, Theweleit focuses above all on phantasms of violence in that radical masculinity, which already bore clear signs of fascist ideals. In doing so he reveals the means and methods used by male soldiers to eradicate all "soft" traits, all erotic and emotional impulses, by creating a kind of cultural armor for their own bodies. In his observations, Theweleit thus approaches the territory examined around the same time by Kantor. Interestingly, a key role in the psychological portrait of the male soldier as presented by Theweleit is played by the figure of the "not-yet-fully-born"

158 Kantor, "Wojsko. Le Soldat – L'Individu Militaire," p. 20.

(*Nicht-zu-Ende-Geborenen*).[159] Employing psychoanalytical tools of interpretation—from Sigmund Freud and Melanie Klein to Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari—the author applies the term to individuals who have experienced painful ordeals in childhood, which in turn strongly determine their adult life. The "not-yet-fully-born" is therefore incapable of overcoming the feeling of bodily fragmentation and disintegration that is normal in childhood, or of dealing with the fears and uncertainties arising in that period of life. The consequence of such a dysfunctional process in the formation of the "I" in which the "pain principle" (*Schmerzprinzip*) replaces the "pleasure principle" (*Lustprinzip*) is, according to Theweleit, an inability in adulthood to recognize work, love, birth, and cognition as separate from acts of violence.[160] The fear of emotions and sexuality is thus connected with a fear of self-dispersion that can only be overcome by "truly masculine acts of violence" (such as war), which in turn enable the formation of a personal "I": the "I" of a man/soldier who turns his vulnerable body into an extra-resilient shell—a machine.

In *Wielopole, Wielopole*, the effect of this inability to forge an adult identity and the permanent compulsion to return to childhood seems ever-present, as does a mounting fear of life, accompanied by a celebration of death. A key function in this failure to be born, this fear of birth, is played by the peculiar relationship between the figure of the soldier-machine and another device present on the stage—the photo camera. There is a strong correlation between the male fantasy of having a camera and homicide, a link emphatically described by Susan Sontag: "To photograph people is to violate them, by seeing them as they never see themselves, by having knowledge of

159 Klaus Theweleit, *Male Fantasies*, trans. Stephen Conway (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987 [vol. 1], 1989 [vol. 2]). See particularly the fragment "Collected Observations on the Ego of the Not-Yet-Fully-Born," pp. 252–57.
160 Ibid., p. 150.

them that they can never have; it turns people into objects that can be symbolically possessed."[161]

Kantor's strategy for unmasking the violence of photography as a kind of sublimation of the weapon and for comparing the cruelty of taking pictures with a sublimated murder,[162] turns out to be a mechanized ritual derived from the archive of Western civilization, a necroperformance carried out by a theatre artist with the remains of modernity—circulating images as mere prosthetics of identity. This mechanical necroperformance seems to replace mourning rites that are performed in order to separate the deceased from the living and to provide for their reintegration. However, as it takes the place of traditional rituals that are dying out in contemporary society, the photograph—as Sławomir Sikora suggested inspirationally—cannot fully replace them, and, moreover, does not trigger the ability to convert "suffering into grief."[163] In *Wielopole, Wielopole* this secular ritual of repeated suffering without the ability to work through it is manifested in the play by the act of taking photographs. This act is accompanied onstage by both the personage and the perspective of the photographer, as well as the medium used in the act, the photo camera; and finally the persons being photographed, whose corporeality becomes somewhat formatted, skewed, and subjugated by the camera. Not without significance here is the fact that this operation is performed in the presence of soldiers' bodies, that collective half-dead and half-living organism which itself

> begins to resemble a nightmarish machine
> whose parts are people

161 See Susan Sontag, "In Plato's Cave," in Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (New York: Anchor Books Doubleday, 1990), p. 14.
162 See ibid., pp. 14–15.
163 Sławomir Sikora, "Fotografia: pamięć i egzystencja," *Fotografia. Od dagerotypu do galerii Hybrydy*, eds. Danuta Jackiewicz and Zofia Jurkowlaniec (Warsaw: Stowarzyszenie Historyków Sztuki, 2008), p. 9.

stripped of free will,
defiled human beings
tortured
dehumanized.[164]

This is the 20th-century depiction of the valley of dry bones—a revised vision of Ezekiel and a reinterpreted stage echo of Wyspiański's drama through the cruelty of World War II. It is why Kantor's performance, repeating the World War I experience, emerges as a mechanized post-sacral ritual, in which self-reproducing body-objects, soldier hybrids, and things have taken the place of organic human remains.

***

Remains, remnants, leftovers are not merely spectral traces of history but lasting and tangible matter that renders the past still present, audible, and palpable despite the presumption of time as ephemeral and perishable. But this past making itself evident in the nowness of matter is not only of a human nature and speaks not exclusively of human temporality. It is also the memory and history of places and things in and of themselves, autonomous from humanity, our experiences and our understanding of history. Cut off from our direct experience and pushed beyond the borders of the world known to us, things,[165] located in an archive as inanimate objects for the study and reconstruction of human history, occupy a space analogous to the memory of bones—after all, things, like bones, have their post-mortal lives, which affect the earthly lives of humans. "The relic (*kayvaluba*) brings the departed back to our mind and

164 Notes from *Wielopole, Wielopole* rehearsals. Rehearsal entries marked "31/3/80," typed manuscript, Archiwum Galerii Foksal [Galeria Foksal Archive].
165 See Bjørnar Olsen, *In Defense of Things. Archaeology and the Ontology of Objects* (Lanham, Md: Altamira Press, 2010).

makes our inside tender,"[166] writes Bronisław Malinowski in *The Sexual Life of Savages*. In describing the burial and mourning rituals of the Trobriand Islanders, the anthropologist reminds us that upon exhumation, a body is removed from the grave so that certain bones can be taken and used as things of a specific status—as relics. The process of objectifying human remains is preceded by the act of sucking the bones dry to clean them of the decaying flesh of the deceased. Such a picture, so suggestively painted by the anthropologist, not only demonstrates how remains achieve autonomy but also offers an apt reflection of the role bones and things play in what I call necroperformance. After all, a necroperformance does not pose questions concerning the ways in which the deceased's remains are utilized by the living. In fact it is not the living who handle the bones of the dead, but the opposite—the migrating remains perform transformations in the world of the living.

166 Malinowski, *The Sexual Life of Savages in North-Western Melanesia*, p. 133.

Fig. 30: Hans Adolf von Moltke, Józef Piłsudski, Joseph Goebbels, Józef Beck during a meeting in Belvedere in Warsaw on July 15, 1934.

Theory as Remains—An Epilog[1]

On September 21, 2011, in the Martin-Gropius-Bau museum in Berlin, the presidents of Poland and Germany officially opened the exhibition *Side by Side. Poland – Germany. A 1000 Years of Art and History*, whose aim was to decipher the complicated history of Polish-German relations. Among the nearly 800 works shown in the exhibition (curated by Anda Rottenberg) was a film by Artur Żmijewski, BEREK (Game of Tag, 1999). This not-quite-five-minute video shows a group playing tag—a game known to everyone in the West and beyond. Though the basic rules of the game were maintained—the objective is for the person who is "it" to catch and touch another player, who then becomes "it"—we notice from the very first frame that some alterations have been made: instead of children playing in an open playground the players are nude adults and are confined to a small, claustrophobic space with crumbling, stained, water-damaged, moldy walls. Though impossible to identify, the setting triggers a sense of fear in the viewer, especially when we discover that the players, initially casual and smiling, one at a time disappear from the room. The onscreen text closing the film validates the sense of dread: BEREK was shot in two rooms that are practically indistinguishable at first glance—in a cellar of a home and a room in a concentration camp.

Żmijewski's film was promptly removed from the Berlin exhibition. The decision was made by Martin-Gropius-Bau's director, Gereon Sievernich, at the request of Hermann Simon, the director of the New Synagogue Berlin – Centrum Judaicum Foundation, who called for the video's removal, alleging it disrespected the dignity of Holocaust victims. However, this was

1 The content of this chapter is an extended version of the text "Necro-performance: Theory as a Remnant" published in: *Aesthetic Theory*, eds. Dieter Mersch, Sylvia Sasse and Sandro Zanetti (Zurich: diaphanes, 2019).

not the first time that a video by Artur Żmijewski had been censored in Germany. The similar fate was met by his work *80064* in 2004, when it was rejected from *Auschwitz-Prozeß Ks 2*/63, an exhibition in Frankfurt am Main for which one of the themes was "renewal" and which included restored concentration camp documents. Żmijewski chose to take a literal approach to the exhibition's title, deciding to restore the identification number tattooed on the skin of 92-year-old Auschwitz prisoner Józef Tarnawa, treating it as a historical document and thereby—as the artist himself stated—"as an artifact in need of restoration."[2]

The case of Berek, however, proved exceptional. The removal of the video from the exhibition set a precedent, emboldening others to censor Żmijewski's piece. Finally, in 2018, Berek was outright banned from public display and a lawsuit was filed by a public prosecturor against the artist. This blatant denial of artistic free speech transpired just after it came to light that the actual location used in Berek was a gas chamber in the Stutthof concentration camp. The site, up to that point known only to a handful of art historians, was identified by the Israeli lawyer David Schonberg during a broadcast of Princess Kate and Prince William's visit to the camp in July 2017. When it became known that this gas chamber was the room in Żmijewski's film, the State of Israel filed a notice to Polish President Andrzej Duda demanding the case of Berek be ruled on once and for all. The video, a complicated discourse on history, memory, and commemorative rituals became the focal point of an over-simplified ideological debate. Anthropologist Joanna Tokarska-Bakir had this to say about the ballooning reaction to the radicalism of Berek:

2 Porozmawiajmy o "80064". Dialog między Agatą Araszkiewicz i Arturem Żmijewskim, http://www.obieg.pl/rozmowy/5691.

> It's interesting how the whole issue with BEREK explodes now. The video is old. I would emphasize the fact that it is a way of breaking with the kitsch of the Holocaust—which is presented as the guardian of memory, while at the same time that very memory is destroyed, ensuring that the Holocaust would remain a Jewish-only issue. Your video is a way of dealing with the violent appropriation of the Holocaust—through a shock re-coding of that which has become congealed in the solemn interpretations controlled by the "high priests."[3]

The highly politicized reception of Żmijewski's piece reveals the flaws in the belief that a site of memory is something immutable. The site of memory is not only the location of a past event but also a process that is constantly being renewed. The site of memory resurfaces in performance via cultural reenactments, which, rather than rendering the past alive, have the opposite effect: they transform the past into a fixed and sacrosanct image. This transformation is another normative side of repetition practices; they are actions serving as the grounds for the politics of memory. Żmijewski's work is thus particularly provocative: though it relies on the strategy of repetition, it does so in order to expose the difference between conservative and subversive practices of reconstruction and repetition. Żmijewski adopts the basic structure inherent to reenactments—raising the issue of the relationship between a live event and its reconstruction, between presence and its remediation, between the body and an image, and between performativity and visuality. Yet, in dealing with the problems of documenting history, he concentrates above all on the criticality of the message, on the issue of power and abuse that are forcefully exposed in the repetitive strategies and in the media structure of his work as an artist.[4] BEREK demonstrates how, under the influence of the

3 http://blog.berlinbiennale.de/en/projects/berek-by-artur-zmijewski-22243.html.

4 In Żmijewski's work, strategies based on repetition occupy a key place in his reflections on the mechanisms of power and violence. Such an understanding of

politics of memory, a given site changes not only into autonomous matter but also into something that itself begins to define and dictate human behavior, something that has the power to control. Żmijewski stands up to the necropolitical aspects of the politics of memory, pointing out that commemorative practices in fact disable any active access to history. In doing so he unmistakably contrasts memory and history, hinting at the need to reclaim the latter for the living.

> They know where they are—in the gas chamber of a former Nazi extermination camp. BEREK is about a part of history that is treated as "untouchable" and about overly painful memories, when the official commemorations of this history are not enough. The murdered people are victims—but we, the living, are also victims. And as such we need a kind of treatment or therapy, so we can create a symbolic alternative; instead of dead bodies we can see laughter and life. BEREK is about how we can engage with this brutal history and work with

reconstruction is most strongly evident in POWTÓRZENIE (Repetition, 2005), a film documenting Żmijewski's efforts in Poland to repeat a psychological experiment conducted by Philip Zimbardo in 1971. Its aim was to expose the mechanisms of violence affecting prison inmates, and it was prematurely concluded after seven days due to the brutality of the subjects' reactions. Żmijewski's project was at once a repetition, re-enactment, and continuation of the experiment in different social, cultural, political, and media conditions. The fictional prison was outfitted with one-way mirrors, five roving cameras operators, and several security cameras monitoring the inmates' behavior at night. Żmijewski continued exploring the issue of media spectacles' impact on social behavior in *Msza* (Mass, 2011). An attempt to mimetically reconstruct a Roman Catholic mass onstage at Teatr Dramatyczny in Warsaw, *Msza* became an inquest into the Catholic Church's role in the Polish society. Żmijewski first took note of the work as spectacle, he intended his piece as a re-enactment of the the mourning rituals, upon witnessing the intensification of the Church's activity after the air catastrophe that took the life of the Polish president in Smoleńsk. *Msza* was an attempt to expose the deeply internalized mechanisms of religious spectacle. As far as the political and historical sources of reconstructive practices are concerned, also quite interesting are some other works by Żmijewski, such as his documentation of a Warsaw Uprising reconstruction in *Demokracje* (Democracies, 2009) and his twice-staged (in Berlin and in Warsaw) *Bitwa o Berlin 1945* (Battle of Berlin 1945, 2012).

> imposed memory. It's possible to have active access to history, and to attempt to emancipate ourselves from the trauma.[5]

Though an affective relation to the past events is linked in Berek through the cognitive process of exploring the present, it not does amount to a complete symbolization of traumatic experiences and the related sense of control. The process remains latent; it enables a fragmentary actualization in the form of a symptom, constituted in the relationship between appearing and disappearing. Berek is not about reconstructing a specific traumatic event in order to understand it, to work through it, or act it out; instead it is about finding the event's place in a complex set of notions, in a social imaginary where a multitude of traumatic events and historical narratives coexist.

Playing a key role in Żmijewski's film is the viewers' vacillation between knowledge and ignorance, between what is consciously perceived and unconsciously experienced, between remembering and forgetting. The moment the public learns about the actual location of the shoot, viewers begin to reconstruct the events as a witness of the film—they attempt to reconstruct the exact appearance of the film's location, to distinguish between the cellar of a home and the gas chamber by identifying the stains on the walls to be "yellowish-blueish stains left by Zyklon-B."[6] In the process, the viewer's perceptive memory work begins to resemble an investigation—the act of collecting material evidence in order to confirm the identity of the place observed just moments prior. This reactive attempt to identify the materiality of the place by reconstructing the images remembered is a process aptly described by Eyal Weizman as "an archeology of the physicality of the media by which it was

5 http://blog.berlinbiennale.de/en/projects/berek-by-artur-zmijewski-22243.html.

6 https://artmuseum.pl/en/archiwum/archiwum-7-berlin-biennale/1848

captured."[7] Today the remains of the site of genocide serve as the camp museum, which is a site of memory[8] and thus a kind of institutionalized collective memory of the atrocity that was the Holocaust. This is a crucial means of surviving the tragic event and of preserving specific ways of commemorating it. The camp is at once a cemetery and an archive, and for this reason may be treated as "a kind of shared community between living and dead [...,] a place of imaginary evocations, fantasies, and collective fears."[9] As a site afflicted by cultural taboo, possessing an autonomous identity and its own history, the former concentration camp becomes for Żmijewski the site where these fears can be confronted. In the topography of death that intertwines historical references with individual experience, Żmijewski initiates a situation in which the bodily actions of the performers reconstructing a children's game on the basis of habit or memory stand in radical contradiction to the behavioral decorum within the camp as a site of memory.

Żmijewski's choice of tag as the activity to disrupt the site of memory was by no means random. The essence of this game is constant motion and interaction; continual change of place, direction, and roles. Designated identity is not a permanent state but a transitive one—anyone can become the victim. The game affirms and manifests the existing social rules on which people's cultural behavior is based, and at the same time makes it possible to subvert those rules. Though the game seems like an innocent children's activity, the objective is to designate one player a victim and the physically stronger player dominant over the weaker ones, revealing the underlying structural violence.

7 Eyal Weizman, "Introduction. Part II: Matter against Memory," in *Forensis: The Architecture of the Public Truth*, eds. Anselm Frank and Eyal Weizman (Berlin: Sternberg Press, Forensic Architecture, 2014), p. 365.

8 See Pierre Nora, "Mémoire collective," in *Faire de l'histoire*, eds. Jacques Le Goff and Pierre Nora (Paris: Gallimard, 1974).

9 Arlette Farge, *The Allure of the Archives*, trans. Thomas Scott-Railton (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2013), p. 110.

Moreover, the many variations of the game of tag, all leading to an agonizing division into winners and losers,[10] indicates that, in addition to belonging to the category known as "elimination games," it possesses an inherent potential to be a form of "dark play,"[11] imbued with a hefty element of risk and danger.

It is the dark play of tag that Artur Żmijewski toys with: "This work is full of cruel games, sadism, and nudity but also childlike levity. Its about visually reconstructing a situation. Just as it used to be: naked people in a gas chamber. But instead of horror there is laughter, fun, erotic games, innocent frolic."[12] The dark play arises out of the clash of two radically different situations: childhood amusements and mass murder. Żmijewski's simultaneous visual reconstruction of these antithetical situations renders them both unintelligible and places all participants in a liminal situation. As the orchestrator of the entire project, the artist himself commits a radical transgression with unforeseeable consequences: what will happen if I infringe on a cultural taboo? The performers executing seemingly simple physical actions within a site of memory betray an overwhelming sense of uncertainty in their behavior: am I allowed to use my body this way in here? The fear is apparent in their bodies, which should be relaxed as they play, but are instead tense, constrained, embarrassed, and timid. Finally, the video's viewers, who are less aware of the risk involved in joining the game, gradually fall into a state of anxiety as they begin to make sense of the game's danger: am I allowed to watch what I am watching? In this manner Żmijewski exposes in his reconstruction the essence of that which Jacques Rancière calls "the distribution of the sensible," which is

10 See *Tag (game)* on Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tag_(game).
11 Richard Schechner, *Performance Studies: An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2013), p. 118–21).
12 https://zacheta.art.pl/pl/kolekcja/katalog/zmijewski-artur-berek.

> the system of self-evident facts of sense perception that simultaneously discloses the existence of something in common and the delimitations that define the respective parts and positions within it. A distribution of the sensible therefore establishes at one and the same time something common that is shared and exclusive parts.[13]

BEREK thereby exposes the deep-rooted links between aesthetic practices and political practices, and between practice and theory.

The outright ban on Żmijewski's film resulted in its deletion from the public realm—from exhibition and museum spaces as well as from the internet, where all that remains of BEREK are film stills. As virtual remnants, they are a kind of phantom trace, evidence of the work's existence; but they can also be treated as the beginnings of a new process if we follow the reasoning of archive scholar Arlette Farge, who says that "the fragmented expression of being is also an event."[14] Żmijewski's video, which was initially a document of a live performance, itself went on to become an ephemeral object as a result of the regime of the sensible.

Its remnants circulating in the virtual archive may now—without the active involvement of the artist—undergo new performative and narrative processes.

Performativity of Performance

Contemporary art, with its propensity for strategies based on repetition and documentation, has accustomed us to dealing with hybrid works. Such artworks, which tend to incorporate a variety of media forms to present scripted and performative

13 Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*, trans. Gabriell Rockhill, (New York: Continuum, 2004), p. 12.
14 Farge, *The Allure of the Archives*, p. 82.

action, also tend to be transdisciplinary and to mix genres. In analyzing these works it becomes difficult to draw a solid line between artistic practice and aesthetic theory. For this reason, works of this kind are suitable for studying the existing links between the arts and between the discourses of (art) history and (art) theory. They also serve as examples of efforts to bridge the gap between practice and theory. Because these phenomena focus on processes of transmitting and mediating artistic activity itself, they demonstrate a gravitational shift (and thus a shift of the spectator's attention) away from the artifact toward the experience of the work in its space-time dimension. Every artistic practice—not only those of a supposedly ephemeral nature such as theatre, dance, and performance art—thus has the potential to be performative.

The emphasis on interaction and the use of multiple media that characterizes not only performance art but also video and installation art transforms a work's reception into a sensual experience. As a result, any analysis of the work becomes a reconstruction of a complex and fragmentary epistemological process. In this manner, the perception of an artistic practice and any critical reflection on it become a kind of performance in which the sensual and corporal are inseparable from the discursive and mediated. Such an understanding of this contemporary "performative art"—no longer limited to traditional performing arts but now embracing visual media to contain, or rather preserve, situations, actions and events—will influence the shape of theoretical discourse on art and modify theoretical structures to generate new aesthetic categories. And for this reason each discourse—whether in the form of artistic practice or aesthetic theory—has the potential to surpass the limits of its own discipline.

The mixed forms characteristic of contemporary art, which transcend the clearly defined boundaries of genre and discipline (such as film, video, dance, theatre, performance art), and often shine an inquisitive spotlight on the self-archiving

processes and the intermedia interdependencies within a work, also lead to (a further) decentralization of existing theories on performance and performativity. Above all artistic practices based on repetition—such as reenactments, reperformances, reassemblages, restagings, remixes—are open to critical reflection on the aspects of performativity that anticipate recording, storing, and transmitting an event (a performance). Such practices may be deemed epistemic not only because their methods contain their own interpretation but also because they are irreducibly tied to the history and theory of art: what is particular refers to what is paradigmatic, and theoretical concepts are grounded in concrete matter. In this very way contemporary art itself—in practice and in the language of art—poses a series of fundamental questions that comprise the central interests of 1960s and '70s performance art and avant-garde theatre, and continue to form the framework of today's theoretical debates surrounding performance and documentation.[15]

Performance theory today is a multidimensional and decentralized scholarly field combining aesthetics and performativity with a spectrum of cultural and philosophical reflections, dealing with everything from speech acts to ritual and theatrical activity; to material embodiments of gender, sex, and race norms; to neurobiological notions of perception and the analysis of scientific paradigms. Yet it is still not fully able to

15 The work of American performance theorists has had profound influence on this debate. See, among others, Peggy Phelan, *The Ontology of Performance: Representation Without Reproduction* (London: Routledge, 1993); Philip Auslander, *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture* (London: Routledge, 1999); Diana Taylor: *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003); Rebecca Schneider: *Performing Remains. Art and War in Times of Theatrical Reenactment* (London: Routledge, 2011); Amelia Jones and Adrian Heathfield, eds., *Perform, Repeat, Record: Live Art in History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012); André Lepecki, ed., *Dance: Documents of Contemporary Art* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2012); Marta Dziewańska and André Lepecki, eds., *Points of Convergence: Alternative Views on Performance* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2017). Among Polish titles, see *RE//MIX. Performans i dokumentacja*, 2014).

prevail over artistic practice. Art theory often provides points of reference, but not models that fully explain performing arts. This is because art itself continuously creates new definitions of what is performative. In effect, theory functions as remains of artistic practice. It constitutes a dead fragment of the cognitive process—a performative *necros* that is enlivened in art and by art but can function as an autonomous entity independent from the "source" and from the "original" theoretical context.

Performance and Documentation

The "ontology of performance art" states that performance constitutes something of an ephemeron, a one-off and unrepeatable event that is by nature presentistic and defies all forms of recording, conservation, and storage and that crystalizes only in its fleetingness—exactly at the moment of its absence.

> Performance's only life is in the present. Performance cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations of representations: once it does so, it becomes something other than performance. [...] Performance's being, like the ontology of subjectivity proposed here, becomes itself through disappearance.[16]

In the above excerpt, probably the most frequently quoted words on performance documentation, Peggy Phelan outlines the concept of the fleetingness and irreproducibility of living art, a hallmark of the work of artists of the 1960s and '70s. Lurking behind this idea is a postulated opposition to media culture, synonymous with the circulation of capital, which subordinates performance and whoever executes it to the economy of production and reproduction. Because from this perspective

16 Phelan, *The Ontology of Performance*, p. 146.

every form of mediation of the active body (text, image, video) is believed to be the antithesis of performance, the completion of the activity hinges on the "passing" of the body as the vessel of meaning and energy and as the medium of the sensual experience. Total disappearance in the present—with no visible traces or material remains—is what makes, in Phelan's opinion, performance performance.

Meanwhile, from the perspective of the discourse on the "anthropology of performance,"[17] performance always appears repeated and is in fact a repetition, because all human activity is believed to be "restored behavior."[18] As Richard Schechner argues, performance never means something taking place for the first time. "Performance means: never for the first time; for the second to the nth time, *twice-behaved behavior*."[19] "Restored behavior" is not a performative process in and of itself but a material preserved in the body, a flesh remnant of a bygone process, and at the same time a means for identifying a new behavior—a performance. It must thus be understood as a "living behavior," which, like film clips in the hands of a movie editor, can be "rearranged or reconstructed."[20] From the anthropological standpoint, performance is a self-reflective act that occurs through repeating and reexperiencing already existing cultural patterns, language norms, and social meanings. Because performance takes place in the body and by the body, it need not rely on any external documentation, which could

17 "Anthropology of performance" took shape in the Unites States in the 1980s as an interdisciplinary field of study combining the anthropological work of Victor Turner with the theatre studies work of Richard Schechner. See Richard Schechner, *Between Theater and Anthropology* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985); *Performance Theory* (London: Routledge, 1988); *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press 1974); and Victor Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play* (New York: PAJ Publications, 1982); *The Anthropology of Performance* (New York: PAJ Books, 1987).

18 Richard Schechner, "Restoration of Behavior" in Schechner, *Between Theater and Anthropology*.

19 Ibid., p. 36.

20 Ibid., p. 35.

constitute a foreign body in such a process. In this it defies the rule of representation.

This aspect of bodily activity's self-reflectiveness and self-sufficiency is emphasized by "antropologia widowisk" (anthropology of performance and/or of spectacle), a field combining American performance studies with Polish cultural studies. A local iteration of the anthropology of performance, "antropologia widowisk" deals with the whole spectrum of human activity (from everyday life to social practices, rituals, and art) in a broad cultural context, relying on comparative examination to portray human life in all its dynamic aspects—as a process that is essentially never complete but made apparent in the repetitive rhythm of cultural spectacles. Leszek Kolankiewicz argues that:

> Antropologia widowisk [...] sees in culture, above all, *social memory that is stored in dramatic structures* and the dynamic regularity of learned and repeated behavior. Culture as a whole is viewed [...] through spectacles, with all of their dramatic action. In them, and only in them, does the entirety of humanity emerge, the entirety of this protagonist of anthropological reflection." (emphasis added)[21]

Though both of these points of view—the aesthetic and the anthropological—seem at odds in their conclusions on the essence of performance, it is in fact possible to find in them a common belief in the possibility and necessity of differentiating presentistic and bodily human activity from mediatized culture, which is a threat to the autonomy (social, political, existential) of individuals and/or groups. Both the ontology of the "here and now" and anthropological performance theory define themselves through a radical separation of live experience from mediated experience, human memory from

21 Leszek Kolankiewicz, "Ku antropologii widowisk," in eds. Agata Chałupnik, Wojciech Dudzik, Mateusz Kanabrodzki, Leszek Kolankiewicz, *Antropologia widowisk. Zagadnienia i wybór tekstów* (Warsaw: WUW, 2005), p. 24.

media documentation, "shared bodily presence" (*leibliche Ko-Präsenz*)[22] from the passive existence of remnants. Performance is treated as a bodily act, regardless of whether it is understood as ephemeral or repeated, one whose materiality is clearly something different from the matter of remains.

In critical texts, however, there emerges an acceptance of the mutual relationship between direct and mediated experience in performance. Philip Auslander even argues that only documentation can be proof of the existence of performance,[23] thanks to which the use of media proves to be an effective means of overcoming this living art form's tracelessness. For Diana Taylor, meanwhile, performance is a "vital act of transfer" of social structures, cultural forms of memory, and identity politics, and is encapsulated in the complex reciprocal relationship between the archive (meaning recorded and stored in text and other media) and the repertoire (ephemeral social practices, cultural spectacles, political gestures, and rituals).[24] Neither of these positions, however, treats media that function as storage as a living tissue that could be an entity independent from the documented activity and having its own transformative potential. Performance theory is responsible for the rise of the cultural myth of the active human body (even if that body is subject to cultural repression and social restrictions) as it is differentiated from inanimate objects, organic remains, and undefined leftovers, radically excluded from the symbolic order as the abject.[25] This distinction, which neglects the cultural impact of the performative necros, may be treated as a manifestation of

22 For more on "shared bodily presence" see Erika Fischer-Lichte, *The Transformative Power of Performance. A New Aesthetics* (London: Routledge, 2008).

23 Philip Auslander, "The Performativity of Performance Documentation," in *PAJ. A Journal of Performance and Art,* vol. 28, no. 3 (2006), pp. 1–10.

24 See Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire*.

25 See Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror. An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia UP, 1982).

the dualities befitting Western culture and philosophy, such as object/subject, human/inhuman, living/dead.

The Performative Necros as a Remnant

In this book I propose an understanding of performance that reflects the functional relationship between homogenization and differentiation, and expresses the complex and dynamic relationship between cultural studies paradigms, aesthetic theories, and artistic practices. To this end I put forth the notion of the *necroperformance*, which compels us to examine the connections linking living matter and inanimate matter (and vice versa) in the context of performative practice and theory and based on contemporary theories of the archive. To identify this "threshold body" located beyond the dichotomy of object and subject, living and dead, experience and mediation, action and documentation, I suggest the term "necros." Thanks to the work of Ewa Domańska in the field of "dead-body studies," "necros" has gained meaning as a category that encompasses the differentiated semantic and interpretational levels of the relationship between life and death, and that also implies the potential for action in biologically and technologically reproducible matter.[26] In her book, Domańska elucidates the concept of necro-vitalism while also offering an analysis—inspired by anthropology, archeology, new materialism, postcolonial theory, and ecology history—on issues relating to the dead body in the context of the turn toward postanthropocentrism. The relevance of the term "necros" to the study of processual art and performance, however, remains in question, though the issue of disappearing, as well as the agency of matter and its transformative potential, and thus a kind of body ontology, forms a

26 See Ewa Domańska, *Nekros. Wprowadzenie do ontologii martwego ciała* (Warsaw: PIW, 2017).

close link between performance theory and dead-body studies. My objective, therefore, is to propose a theoretical approach that can address the mutual relationship between *necros* and *performance*, an approach rooted in the analysis of contemporary performative (and often inter- and/or trans-media) arts.

In such circumstances, the etymology of "necros" brings some interesting observations, especially with regard to critical reflection in art itself on the archival processes inherent in performative practices. The Greek word νεκρός (*nekrós*) covers a range of meanings, including: corpse, dead body, remains, carrion, carcass, cadaver. In the proto-Indo-European language, we observe the root *nek-*, which may be translated as: to die, to perish, to end life, to be destroyed, but also to wither away, to die out, to be eliminated, and to disappear. As an autonomous language unit, the word "necros" thus describes inanimate matter, but when compounded it is connected with agency and/or process. Necromancy is the conjuration of spirits of the dead; necrolatry is veneration of the dead; necroptosis is the programmed death of cells and tissues—these are just several compelling examples that suggest the word's performative potential. Seen from this angle, "necros" not only refers to the passive remains of a past event but can also indicate movement toward the emergence of a new performative process. As a dead body with imminent potential to enliven material remains, necros thus resides outside the cultural opposition of life and death.

The notion of necroperformance I propose also constitutes an attempt to diminish the meaning of the archive as a traditional institution based on an authoritarian separation of documents from remains. This division may be interpreted as an echo of the conventional distinction in the fields of history and archival studies between *Tradition* and *Überrest*, which served to introduce a distinction between sources created for the purpose of conveying historiographic content and those devoid of

such a function.[27] Because of this, such a division may also be considered a manifestation of the controlled distribution of knowledge and power. In his "Archive Fever," Jacques Derrida points out the interferences between the mediality of archiving techniques and their political implications: "There is no archive without a place of consignation, without a technique of repetition, and without a certain exteriority."[28] The etymology alone betrays the dual nature of the archive's political power. The word derives from the Greek *archeion*, meaning at first house, residence, address, and later office; as well as from the Latin *arca*, meaning a place of safekeeping, or a case, box, or casket. There remains in the dynamic relationship the abstract idea of a place with a specific spatial organization, but at the intersection of the idea of the public institution and the notion of a physical space there emerges a "scene of the domiciliation"[29] of the remains of history, one that is subjected to both a visible and invisible power. Meanwhile, archiving itself, being a manifestation of archontic power, and bringing together the "functions of unification, of identification, of classification,"[30] should be treated not as random, but as the "long-term and organized, collecting and storing"[31] of signs of the past. Archiving is thus an activity of a decidedly processual nature, based not only on the classification of what is (remains) but also on a media creation of events (that will remain), because "the technical struc-

27 See Alfred Heuß, "Überrest und Tradition. Zur Phänomenologie der historischen Quellen," in *Archiv für Kulturgeschichte* no. 25 (1935), pp. 134–83; see also Ernst Bernheim, *Einleitung in die Geschichtswissenschaft* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1926).

28 Jacques Derrida, "Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression," trans. Eric Prenowitz, in *Diacritics,* vol. 25, no. 2 (1995), p. 14.

29 Ibid., p. 10.

30 Ibid.

31 Rainer Hering and Dietmar Schenk, *Wie mächtig sind die Archive? Perspektiven der Archivwissenschaft* (Hamburg: Hamburg University Press, 2013), p. 15.

ture of the archiving archive also determines the structure of the archivable content."[32]

Archiving is both a repetitive processual media activity (a performance of sorts) and a necropolitical practice. Achille Mbembe argues that the order of the archive is not only implemented through language but arises with the help of a series of rituals that transform the archive into a space akin to a temple or cemetery: "fragments of lives and pieces of time are interred there, their shadows and footprints inscribed on paper and preserved like so many relics."[33] These fragments of lives are precisely the material and immaterial remains that, through archival rituals, are not only organized but ultimately sequestered from life and the present. A portion of them are *a priori* removed from the archive space as useless remnants, while a portion are classified as documentation worth saving (and preserving), their ontological status as archival objects no longer in question. From this perspective, archiving is less an act of interference in the past than a process of creating that past with the use of violence, because it is only the archived remains of the experienced present that become the building blocks of history. The archive itself, meanwhile, is recognized as a space in which the line between life (*bios*) and death (*necro*) is particularly delicate, and where politics becomes necropolitics.[34] In politics concerned with governing death instead of life, of fundamental importance is the question of the place occupied in a past society by organic remains and other remnants playing the anthropological part of bones, and the treatment of these remains.

32 Derrida, "Archive Fever," p. 17.

33 Achille Mbembe, "The Power of the Archive and Its Limits," in *Refiguring the Archive*, ed. Carolyn Hamilton et al. (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2002), p. 19.

34 See Achille Mbembe, "Necropolitics," trans. Libby Meintjes, in *Public Culture* vol. 15, no. 1 (2003), pp. 11–40.

The Necropolitical Performance

To transform select remains into archival source material means plucking them from the stream of life and declaring them dead. From that point onward they belong solely to the past and are protected—like the dead (necros)—by the taboo of inviolability. From this perspective the archive appears to be a burial site of remains—a quasi-religious ritual taking place in modern societies under the guise of rationalism and historicity. At the same time this secular ritual is in danger of wiping out evidence of the political violence that classified certain bodies worthy of survival and others unworthy; worthy of being remembered and commemorated or unworthy.[35] From this perspective it is of key significance when the material remains of the dead who have been excluded from official history—those who like the Guantanamo prisoners whose poetry, as Judith Butler argues, is, "a sign formed by a body, a sign that carries the life of the body"—are retrieved.[36] These remains thus harbor a subversive political power, creating a kind of "network of transitive affects"[37] that form the basis of a critical acts of opposition to the archive's necropolitics.

The archive may thus be considered a place for managing death, a place where a peculiar necropolitical performance takes place as an act of interfering with history, carried out on historical remains as if on a cadaver. A corpse itself, argues the French thanatologist Louis-Vincent Thomas, is a culturally empty signifiant "functioning without a phenomenal object."[38] Only via the funeral ritual does a corpse, being a marginal body of

35 See Judith Butler, *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?* (New York: Verso, 2010).
36 Ibid., p. 59
37 Ibid., p. 62.
38 Louis-Vincent Thomas, *Le cadavre. De la biologie à l'anthropologie* (Brussels: Complexe, 1980), p. 45. "On a dit du cadavre qu'il restait un signifiant vide fonctionnant sans sujet phénoménal."

unclear ontological status, transform into a dead object, undergoing the process of transitioning from the realm of biology to anthropology. Meanwhile, in the opinion of Jean-Didier Urbain, it is only the coffin that "symbolically removes the body-corpse opposition (*l'opposition corps-cadavre*) in favor of the former"; in the coffin "the body takes the place of the corpse."[39] In this way the cultural body—portrayed as permanent and imperishable—becomes more certain than the biological body. Unlike the biological body, it is not subject to material decomposition, which carries with it the decomposition of meanings and semiotic structures. In the process of the deceased being endowed with new meaning, it is critical for the integrity of the body to be reinstated through the act of burial. The burial transforms the inanimate matter of the dead human body into the Funeral Object (*l'Objet Funéraire*).[40] In this way *le cadavre* becomes an object of individual as well as collective projections and phantasmas that are crucial to the stability of the sepulchral culture. From the anthropological perspective the corpse must become a body—a representation of the corpse while also a sovereign entity, detached from decomposing matter, so that it may once again enter the cultural dimension.

The archive's transformation of remains seemingly transpires in a similar fashion. Archived remains are treated solely as traces, as incomplete representations of the past that must be given an identity in the form of documentation to be acknowledged as a part of a given culture's social life. Fundamental to this transformation is the act of removing all doubt as to the remains' ontological status. Achille Mbembe states that the archive is defined in fact by the materiality of the objects gathered therein, though its aim is ultimately to surpass matter[41]—it

39 Jean-Didier Urbain, *La societé de conservation. Étude sémiologique des cimetières d'Occident* (Paris: Payot, 1978), p. 61.

40 See ibid., pp. 28–38.

41 See Mbembe, "Necropolitics," p. 21.

is to build history. The archive, which uses material remains to create documents having the status of evidence, enables history, and vice versa: history endows remains with the credibility of a document. Thus, by institutionalizing the archive, a montage of fragments creates an "illusion of totality and continuity," which in turn makes it possible to interpret history as a "product of a composition."[42] Nonetheless, things that have been stripped of their reality in the process of archiving can regain their materiality through theoretical and artistic experiments in relation to the inanimate, revealing the performative nature of necros.

The Re-Materialization of Matter

In his work on the anthropology of knowledge, Michel Foucault challenges the notion of the document as a passive object that serves as the basis for historical truth. He counterposes it with the idea of the "monument," [43] as living matter that ought to be studied in the manner of an archeologist studying source materials. The document as a monument should thus not be treated as a sign of something else or as something that "must be pierced if one is to reach at last the depth of the essential in the place in which it is held in reserve."[44] Instead we must accept its noncontinuity and study the relationships within the document itself, in search of "formal analogies or translations of meaning."[45] According to Foucault, the horizon of archeology is thus "a tangle of interpositivities whose limits and points of intersection cannot be fixed in a single operation," with the aim of archeological comparison never having "a unifying,

42 Ibid.
43 Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge and The Discourse on Language* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972), p. 139.
44 Ibid., p. 138.
45 Ibid., p. 163.

but a diversifying, effect."[46] From the perspective proposed by Foucault, "history" means the processing and activation of documentary matter, and thus is something of an archival performance comprising impermanent forms of preservation, including that most impermanent archive: the living body.

Remains and documents themselves are materials that can be studied outside the rule of representation through a situational, subjective, and sensual experience of matter, which constitutes a *sine qua non* condition for necroperformance. Therefore necroperformance ought to be understood as a non-normative, situation-oriented concept (contrary to the violence of the institutional archive), defined by way of network-like relationships and interactions among subjects of various ontological status. Necroperformance is located at the cross-section of various temporalities and spatialities, initiating fragmentary and performative experiences and reconstructions of history understood as a dynamic cultural process. Through the remediation of material remains of history, the necroperformance unveils the dead dimension in the living and the living nature of the dead, which allows for constant shifts in the meaning of what is reenacted or reanimated. In necroperformance not everything is motion, action, or passage. Necroperformance often takes the form of action being halted, continuity being interrupted, which casts the motion, frozen like an image, into the ambivalent space between death and revival, between change and regression, between preservation and ruin. Since the necroperformance makes it possible to experience a time loop related to the overlap and interaction of multiple temporalities, past experiences and memories are imbued with new meaning. Necroperformance thus becomes a tool for renewed consideration and redefinition of the relationships between performance and the archive, as well as between the body and documents. By way of such a concept it is possible to decon-

46 Ibid., p. 159–60.

struct cultural presuppositions concerning the ephemerality of performance and of the body, which ostensibly defy all forms of archiving and leave no lasting traces. To a much greater extent this relates to shifting attention to the experience of death as recorded in the performance itself, as well as to the performative possibilities of reviving what perishes in culture.

The Positivity of Remains

Reenactment is a specific necroperformative practice—a form of epistemic activity that, on account of its dual practical-theoretical status, is situated in the field of reflection covering the relationships between performance and the archive. According to Rebecca Schneider, a reenactment, as a performative reconstruction of history, is in essence a repeated event that, despite the assumption that performance is fleeting, leaves remains that are deposited in the body, "in a network of body-to-body transmission of affect and enactment."[47] From this perspective the bodies of those participating in the reconstruction become a kind of ruin in and of themselves, or rather—in the performative repetition—living historical remains. Describing the body in the midst of a repetition as a kind of proof of the death of someone long deceased, Schneider indirectly formulates a concept of the testimony of flesh, which finds justification and legitimization in a (repeated) experience of an experience—and not in historical truth and identification. Seeing a kind of "counter-memory" in the act of bodily transmission, one that is constitutive of reconstruction practice, Schneider at the same time points out the possibility of treating the archive as a social space while it is subjected to the ephemerality of performance. On the one hand the archive is founded on the ontology of the

47 Schneider, *Performing Remains*, p. 100.

document as an object that is a "survivor of time,"[48] and thus on the ontology of traces, remains, and remnants. On the other hand all forms of documentation, including those that are seemingly permanent—texts, photographs, recordings, incidental records, or other objects of experience—can, precisely as remains, free themselves from the "source" context and the restrictive rules of "archontic house arrest."[49]

In her groundbreaking performance theory, Schneider indicates the incompleteness of repetition. These forms through which past events live on are fragmentary, limited, and fragile; the events are enlivened but in the form of remains. The remains are materialized acts that offer the experience of "the missed encounter—the reverberations of the overlooked, the missed, the repressed, the seemingly forgotten."[50] Remains facilitate the experience of what Schneider calls "crosstemporality," the intersection, entwinement, overlap of the past and the present. The chiasmatic time of a reenactment renders it a kind of transaction, a "ritual negotiation"[51] of an event by virtue of its capacity to enact an active and reciprocal relationship between the past and present. In the notion of remains Schneider identifies both material and intangible remnants ("material evidence, haunting trace, reiterative gesture"[52]) in which different temporalities come together. Yet above all she focuses on the "immaterial labor of bodies engaged in and with that incomplete past: bodies striking poses, making gestures, voicing calls, reading words, singing songs, or standing witness."[53] This corporal laboratory becomes antithetical to the normative, static institution of the archive, which thereby indicates a reenactment to be a form of performance that is

48 Ibid., p. 103.
49 Ibid., p. 105.
50 Ibid., p. 102.
51 Ibid., p. 33.
52 Ibid., p. 37.
53 Ibid., p. 33.

crucial—paradoxically—to the ontology of performance art. This body-archive juxtaposition confirms again that the experience of time is a key experience in performance art, being, as it is, a time-based art.

With the aid of the concept of necroperformance, I wish to underscore the complex relationship of time and space, since the process of archiving is always a kind of topological assignation, the act of depositing something in a specific location "on a stable substrate."[54] This way, not only the performer's body but also the seemingly permanent documentation of the performance in the form of photographs, films, objects, and sites may be treated as potentially active phenomena—performative necros. Archival material can break free of the event, the "source," and develop a sovereign power that is capable of completely blurring the semantic line with the "original" in order to activate a new process—a performance. From this perspective the active body does not reveal itself as permanently threatened by death (disappearing), but rather a thing that in its fleetingness defies the logic of the archive. Recording techniques and media, meanwhile, are not only tools of the archive's violence; they may also be perceived as autonomous matter possessing their own identities and histories.

The Archive as a Site of Necroperformance

I treat the archive as a site for experimentation preceding the writing down of history—the creation of a (scientific or artistic) narrative of an event. The archive is a laboratory that, through activity (of a scholar or an artist) may become—as Bruno Latour argues—a place of activity in which non-humans will emerge on their own and articulate their own historicity as things.[55]

54 Derrida, "Archive Fever," p. 10.
55 See Latour, *Pandora's Hope*, pp. 145–73.

Therefore the archive becomes the site of a certain performance that takes the form of an encounter with the past, an encounter that is initiational in nature: the crossing of the threshold of the present/life and entering the realm of the past/death becomes a kind of rite of passage. This initiational nature of the entry into the archive is usually tied with the first, sometimes entirely random choice of material that will henceforth be subjected to constant mediation and negotiation to ultimately become a part of the image of history constructed by the scholar. As a result of archival research, as Arlette Farge states, "a new object is created, a new form of knowledge takes shape, and a new 'archive' emerges."[56]

Of course, the documents residing in an archive can be nothing more than inanimate objects of study that can allow for a presumably objective reconstruction of the past and/or make it possible to fill in any *a priori* assumptions with concrete material. These inanimate objects are, however, capable of becoming living matter that is still unfamiliar or remains forgotten, and within which lies the potential for an interpretive history while also having its own history as a document undergoing change over time. The material source doesn't have to be interpreted only as a product of past human culture, but can also be treated for "its *thingness* and sociality."[57] Since "the body is not just something we live *in*, but a means by which we experience the world, something we live *through*,"[58] archival objects can "assume a body" in the presence of a scholar or artist and reveal themselves to be active factors in the interaction taking place. Robin Bernstein argues that objects contain within them certain "scriptive things" that can provoke certain forms

56 Farge, *The Allure of the Archives*, p. 62.
57 Bjørnar Olsen, *In Defense of Things: Archaeology and The Ontology of Objects* (Lanham: AltaMira Press, 2013), p. 25.
58 Ibid., p. 27.

of behavior or activity, thereby challenging the strict distinction between archive and repertoire:

> Scriptive things archive the repertoire—partially and richly, with a sense of openness and flux. To glimpse past repertoires through the archive requires a revision of what qualifies as "reading" material evidence. [...] One gains performance competence not only by accruing contextualizing knowledge but also, crucially, by holding a thing, manipulating it, shaking it to see what meaningful gestures tumble forth.[59]

Contact with archival material is not limited to the sense of sight, which, by objectifying, upholds the strict division between subject and object of study, and therefore usually leads to a loss of the thing's temporality. In an archive the senses of touch, smell, and hearing also come alive, endowing the archive's things with their own materiality and historicity as they become a "sensual foundation"—performative necros. The involvement of several sensual components may lead, as Farge would have it, to an affective connection with the document. This attitude leads a scholar or an artist to obsessive archival research and a passionate construction of the historical narrative:

> As you work, you are taking the preexisting forms and readjusting them in different ways to make possible a different narration of reality. [...] You do it almost unconsciously, going through a series of motions and gestures, interacting with the material through a joint process of contradiction and construction. Each process corresponds to a choice, which can sometimes be predictable and sometimes appear surreptitiously, as if it were imposed by the contents of the documents themselves.[60]

59 Robin Bernstein, "Dances with Things: Material Culture and the Performance of Race," in *Social Text* 27, 4 (2009), pp. 89–90.
60 Farge, *The Allure of the Archives*, pp. 62–63.

Only when the other senses besides sight are activated can the work of the scholar arrive at a situation where matter from the past begins to appear on its own, becoming a subject actively taking part in the research. Random and fragmentary matter in which, according Bjørnar Olsen,[61] various temporalities and historical references coexist can shape human experience and memory by interacting with it; but matter itself can also be active and undergo transformation over time even *without* human involvement. This multisensual and multitemporal experience of the past makes it possible to treat the archive as the site of a specific performance, in which interaction, mutual participation, and corporal presence are of greater significance than the objectifying and often preconception-laden analysis of the scholar.

The reciprocal collision of the (ostensibly) dead and the living causes the necroperformance to become a unique occurrence in the process of studying archival materials, which have their own bodies and histories. The necroperformance is a cognitive situation (situated experience) that also wipes away the boundaries between the scholarly and artistic, because it blurs the division between the one who studies and the thing being studied, between object and subject, theory and practice. It therefore defines an occurrence in which existing matter acquires agency, but reveals itself in a specific way in the presence of the observer and/or provokes human action on its own. Yet the necroperformance does not lead into the metaphysical dimension; instead it points to a certain "actor-network[62] or "a collective of Humans and Nonhumans"[63] that enable the existence of a necroperformance. Things speak to us because we

61 Olsen, *In Defense of Things*, p. 108.

62 See Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

63 See Latour, *Pandora's Hope*, pp. 174–215.

are open to their material and historical existence, to their body and performative power.

We too, with all of our conditioning factors—not only scholarly but also social, economic, and political—enter into relationships with things as actors at work. The object reanimated through the relationship invites us to take further action. The body thus answers the call of another body, which continues to seek answers from the former. This gives rise to a cirumstance in which the opposition between object and subject, and action and theory, is dissolved, and in which not only the past but also our relationship with the past is materialized. The necroperformance assumes that the process of the past's transmission and transformation can never be considered fully complete.

Art as a Necro-Archive

Playing a key role in the concept of the necroperformance is the archive as a site of artistic intervention, because it is precisely in contemporary art that the notions of "necros" and "performance" enter into a particularly complex reciprocal relationship. Necros is any material documentation of the past having agency: things and places, but also—in the case of extreme art—abjective remains and organic remnants. Necros is also any media-archived or technologically stored reproductions of remains that are preserved in the accounts of those living "there and then," and in old and modern-day performative, visual, text, and audio works. Performative necros includes more than just directly experienceable archival material residing in institutions that preserve and classify collections. It is also—as in the case of the practice of reenactment—the act of reviving remains, as a cultural spectacle, an artistic performance. Treated as living matter, relics of the past are thus not limited to a thing's tangible presence or activeness. Equally important is material remediation, a repeat use and application of recording

techniques, as only repeated mediation can reveal the processes of transubstantiation taking place under the influence of how archival materials are documented, preserved, and used. It is another archive—art—that preserves the memory of the "true" archive being the house of the Archon, at the same time allowing for critical perspectives on the very processes of archiving. And it is precisely here, in these tensions between matter, technique, and form, and the transpositions of meaning stimulated by material transformation—and in the incompleteness of art as an archive—that a space for necroperformance opens up.

Contemporary artists' intensive exploration of the possibilities of intervening in archives through the use of repetition-based practices lead to experimentation that straddles the line between art and scholarship, practice and theory, history and politics. Striving for a performative reconstruction of events, images, and past situations with the aid of remains preserved in various media (and in archives) not only brings past events into the present but also, and above all, enables artistic reflection on the subject of how history is created, the mechanisms of remembering and forgetting, the status of source materials and accounts, the fictional nature of documentation, and the performative potential of archiving processes. By means of repetition, that is "at once a reenactment and reexperiencing of a set of meanings already socially established",[64] contemporary artists seek to find a gap in the dominant system, to break with the current social norms, with the politics of aesthetics, and with ritualized forms of power.

The interest in reenactment, stage repetition and other reiterative practices among artists like Artur Żmijewski, Katarzyna Kozyra, Karol Radziszewski, Francys Alÿs, Milo Rau, Gob Squad, Tom McCarthy or Omer Fast (to name only a few), hailing from diverse backgrounds and employing various media, leads to the

64 Judith Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution", in *Theatre Journal* 4, 40, 1988, p. 526.

emergence of hybrid forms that defy traditional documentation practices, not to mention theoretical categorization. As contemporary transmedia and processual art crosses the boundaries that delineate art discipline, theory, which arises from those disciplines and the appropriately defined artistic objects and actions, is also driven by these new practices and undergoes radical transformation. As a result of these shifts, theory—including performance and performativity theory—functions in contemporary art as little more than remains.

From the perspective of the performing arts—a field that intensely examines areas like the body being a medium of memory, media processes of archiving, and the status of objects as they interact with humans, and also reflects on the history of performing arts—each theory of performance and performativity is an incomplete or colonizing system, and thus certainly inadequate for analyzing artistic practice. The findings coming out of the ontology of performance, anthropological conclusions on the regularity of repetition in human activity, theory on the rituals of foreign and domestic cultures, culturological interpretations of repetition within social behavior, philosophical ruminations on the subject of textuality and orality and on the performative or speculative character of discourse, analysis of media and of techniques for recording human activity—all of these today admittedly constitute reference points for the performance practices existing in contemporary art, though they also undergo considerable refinement on the basis of examples in practice. Artistic works oscillating between an obsessive interest in compulsively selective history and a creative approach to historical remains and documents, between attempting to connect bodily activity with memory work and striving for a causal exchange (verging on flippancy) with the remains of history, can be interpreted as a kind of artistic response to performative archive theory, while also amounting to a unique body of commentary on the subject of processual art. New artistic practices reveal art to be multiply mediated, highly self-reflective

and self-ironic, as well as fragmentary, adroitly welcoming the processes of transformation, readaptation, and deformation thanks to operations performed on archival remains. In this they reveal art itself to be a decentralized and fluid necro-archive with inexhaustible potential for the creative profanation of history and theory.

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